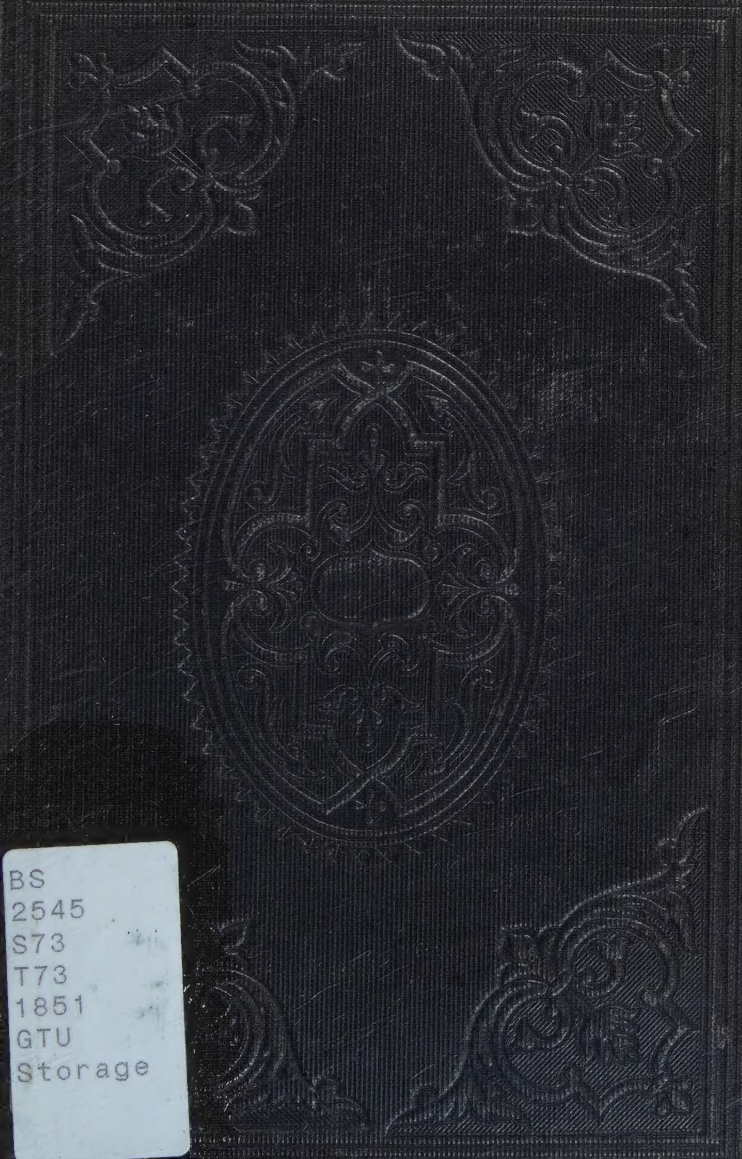

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THE

STAR OF THE WISE MEN:

A Commentary

ON THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

BY

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PREFACE

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THE work here offered is a fine specimen of commentary—abundant in learning, yet adapted to general apprehension and use.

In the present edition, a few passages, appropriate only to readers in the Church of England, are omitted. The matter has also been divided into sections.

J. M'CLINTOCK.

January 1, 1851.

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THE

STAR OF THE WISE MEN:

BEING

A COMMENTARY ON THE SECOND CHAPTER OF ST. MATTHEW.

THE birth of the Lord of glory on earth had its corresponding sign in the heavens. The natural limits of an essay which should undertake to treat of that sign, and of the events most intimately linked with its appearing, are those, as will easily be perceived, of the second chapter of St. Matthew; all the incidents of which hang in closest connexion on the coming of the Magi, and accomplish themselves (with the inclusion, indeed, according to one arrangement, of the presentation in the temple, Luke ii, 22–38) in a perfect and independent cycle. The chapter is thus singularly complete in itself; finding the infant Saviour at Bethlehem, and leaving

him at Nazareth, and constituting, if we may reverently apply the word, an episode in the life of our blessed Lord.

This episode it is my purpose to consider, and to do so with something of the fulness which an essay devoted exclusively to it would alone permit. There is much in it, besides the ease with which it detaches itself from the context, to invite to this its separate treatment. With the exception of the histories of the passion and the resurrection, —which it is evident must strike yet deeper chords in the hearts of the faithful, being facts of our redemption even more central still,—there is perhaps no passage in our Lord's life which has laid a stronger grasp, or set a deeper impress, on the mind and heart and imagination of Christendom. What a witness have we for its hold on the popular affections and imagination in the vast body of legendary lore which has clustered round it; in the innumerable mediæval mysteries which turn on the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the innocents, or the coming of the three kings; and in all

else of poetry and painting which has found its suggestion here! And this deep and manifold interest and delight in this portion of Holy Scripture which others have felt, has very probably been sufficiently explained to each one of us, by the manner in which we ourselves have recurred to it again and again, with an interest ever new, with a wonder ever growing, as we have more and more perceived how deep the mysteries of our faith which are here, in simplest historic guise, presented to us.

Nor may I omit, as a further inducement which I found to this making of it the subject of a separate treatment, the fact that the difficulties which it presents are neither few nor inconsiderable. There are difficulties in its chronology; in the harmonizing of this portion of sacred history with the history of the same or nearly the same period as given in St. Luke; in the use and application of Old Testament prophecies; in the language under which natural phenomena are spoken of; and perhaps in some other matters, although these are certainly the chief. But

while it must freely be allowed that there are such, yet, at the same time, I have been as far as possible from desiring to give an apologetic character to this essay. There is so great a reverence owing to the truth of God—a reverence which should make us reluctant, without extremest necessity, to a putting it on the defensive; the language of apology is one fraught with so many perils; there is so great a danger lest many of our readers may first learn from our defence that what we defend has ever been assailed, and lest, seeking to confirm the faith of others, we may indeed give a shock to theirs,—that by no Christian writer should this language be lightly or needlessly adopted. Something of such a tone a treatise *must* occasionally possess, which has to do with a portion of Holy Scripture that eminently *has* been, and perhaps shall be yet more, like that Lord, the dignities and dangers of whose infancy it records, "a sign spoken against." Yet I have earnestly desired that in this respect I should, at any rate, not run before the needs of my readers.

§ 1.— *Who and What were the Magi.*

The impression which the opening words of this chapter, "*Now when Jesus was born,*" leave on us, as we read them in the original, (and the impression is retained in our English translation,) certainly is, that the visit of the wise men, which the evangelist is about to record, found place *very* shortly after the birth of Christ, and that it is St. Matthew's intention to place the two events in this nearest relation of time. The words do not absolutely compel us to accept such a conclusion, if there were prevailing arguments on the other side, or if the embarrassments were too great which would follow on the reception of this view of the matter; but they certainly strongly suggest that it was so. With only this observation for the present, the question of the chronology of the whole chapter may be reserved for a later and a single discussion, and the more natural time for this will be when we reach the flight into Egypt, for then all will lie before us which has in this respect to be arranged.

Exactly from what region these wise men came, whose homage signalized the Saviour's birth, we are not told. The question has been often debated, but the language of the evangelist—"*Wise men from the East*"*—is too indefinite, and perhaps intentionally too indefinite, to justify any decision. Chrysostom, with most others, either affirm, or seem always to take for granted, that it was Persia; no doubt because Persia was the natural home and haunt of the Magian religion. Yet others have multiplied many arguments in favour of Arabia, as, for instance, its greater nearness—a consideration which would have its weight with those who believed that the

* The *ἀνατολαί*, (with *ἡλίου*, either understood as here, or expressed as Rev. xvi, 12, and continually with, and without, it in the LXX., as Joshua xii, 1-3,) has the *δυσμαί* for its complement. Matt. viii, 11; Luke xiii, 29. Olshausen's *δυσμός* nowhere occurs. The words rest on the same thought as our Orient and Occident, as the Morgen and Abendland of the Germans. If, indeed, "east" is derived, as some suggest, from the Gothic, *ust-an*, surgere, it, too, contains the same allusion. Both words, when used in this sense, appear almost always in the plural; of which the most probable explanation lies in the fact, that men contemplated these quarters as those of the continually recurring sunrises and sunsets.

star did not precede, but accompanied, the Lord's birth, and that this visit of theirs was on the twelfth day after the nativity, since they could scarcely have arrived from any region very remote. They have further urged, that the offered gifts were eminently, and one of them (the frankincense) exclusively, the product of that land, (Ezek. xxvii, 2;) that the word of prophecy had expressly designated "kings of Arabia and Sheba" as those that should bring their gifts, and had named two of these very gifts, to the King and the King's Son.* Psa. lxxii, 10, 15; Isa. lx, 6.

But although "*from the East*" must be left in its indefiniteness, yet the "*wise men*" themselves are not so vaguely designated in

* This is the view taken by Justin Martyr, (*οἱ ἀπὸ Ἀραβίας μάγοι,*) by Tertullian, (Con. Marcion., l. 3, c. 13,) who, speaking of Arabia: Cujus tunc virtutem Christus accepit, accipiendo insignia ejus, aurum et odores; by Grotius, and others. But Arabia is rather to the south, than the east, of Judea; so that the queen of Sheba is, on our Lord's lips, "the queen of the south." Matt. xii, 42. Pliny, too, (H. N., xii, 30,) and others were certainly in error, making the frankincense to be exclusively the product of Arabia.

the original as by this appellation in our version; one which yet is not to be found fault with, as it would not have been easy, if possible, to substitute a better word in its stead. They are Magi. Of these, (that is, of the Magi proper,) the earliest mention is in Herodotus. They were, as from him we learn, a tribe of the Medes, uniting, as the Levites among the Jews, and the Chaldeans among the Assyrians, a common family descent, and the exclusive possession of all sacerdotal and ecclesiastical functions—a priest-caste.* As such, they were the sole possessors of all science and knowledge, and not merely exercised most decisive influence in all private matters, as prophets, as interpreters of dreams, but in political affairs as well. The education of the king was in their hands; they filled his court, composed his council; and although they had not the

* There is, I believe, no doubt concerning the derivation of the name, that it is from *mag* or *mog* = priest, in the old Pehlevi. (See Hyde, De Rel. Vet. Pers., p. 377, and Creuzer, Symbolik, v. i, p. 187.) This is the consenting statement of Porphyry, Apuleius, and all the ancients.

government so directly in their hands as the Egyptian hierarchy, yet they exercised the strongest influence thereon. In all liturgic matters they were supreme; they interpreted the holy books, and, which brings them into more immediate relation with the matter directly in hand, they observed the stars, and read in them the future destinies of men. The name Magian, then, in this its first sense, was a name of highest dignity and honour.

But as it travelled westward, as it detached itself more and more from its original birthplace and its native soil, as it came to be applied, not to the members of this sacerdotal Median caste, but in a secondary sense to all those who, like them, cultivated secret and mysterious arts, read the heavens, and calculated nativities,* it gradually ceased to be this title of honour which once it had been;

* By the same law and progress of thought, *Canaanite*, in more places than one in Scripture, (Job xli, 6; Prov. xxxi, 24,) has quite lost its Gentile signification, and is merely equivalent to "merchant," being so translated in our version. We know, too, how at Rome all astrologers were called Chaldeans.

and, though still remaining more or less such, when applied to those who bore it first, grew to have quite another meaning attached to it, when used about others.* It followed here the fortune of so many other words in all languages, which, having had at first a nobler signification, came afterwards to be used in a worse†—that is, the thing deteriorated, and drew after it, of necessity, a degradation of the word which represented it. Thus was it in the present instance. We can, indeed, easily understand that nowhere would such a degeneracy and deterioration lie nearer than in these arts. How quickly, and yet by what imperceptible degrees, would they

* Thus Jerome (in Dan. ii.): Consuetudo et sermo communis magos pro maleficis accipit; qui aliter habentur apud gentem suam, eò quod sint philosophi Chaldæorum: et ad artis hujus scientiam reges quoque et principes ejusdem gentis omnia faciunt.

† Thus τυραννος, σοφιστης, mathematicus, latro, brigand, Pfaffe, villain. One example for many of the word in its more dishonourable use, the Œdipus Tyrannus supplies. The king addresses Teiresias the prophet, whom he suspects Creon to have suborned with money, as,—

μάγον . . . μηχανορράφον, δόλιον ἀγύρτην:

where Ellendt, on the word μάγον, observes, Convicii instar est.

slip over into fraud, trickery, and imposture, especially when they ceased to be exercised by a responsible guild, but by every man upon his own account.

Seeing that the word "Magian" is thus a middle term, and of twofold use,* the ques-

* The wish which has been sometimes expressed, that our translators had rendered throughout the same Greek word by the same English, (and, of course, where practicable, words different in the original by different in the translation,) is shown, by the single example of this word, to be one with which it would have been impossible entirely to comply. Doubtless, if their attention had been more directed to this point, they might have done, and it would have been to advantage in many ways if they had done, more in this respect than actually they have. In the occasional needless, and sometimes in their degree injurious, inconsistencies, which it would be idle to deny, we have probably a consequence of the many minds and pens that were engaged in the translation; though in minute details it is difficult enough for even the same person to be always consistent with himself; otherwise we should scarcely have had Timothy and Timotheus, an English and a Latin form, in one and the same chapter, 2 Cor. i, 1, 19. But acknowledging, as we must, such perfect consistency not to be very easy of attainment, we may yet express our regret that distinctions such as certainly exist, — for example, between *φρόνιμος* and *σοφός*, *κλέπτης* and *ληστής*, *σημεῖον* and *τέρας*, and which might have been so easily preserved, should yet have been, in great part, obliterated for the English reader, as any one following

tion has often presented itself, In which sense does St. Matthew use it? Is the title given to these visitors of the cradle of the infant Lord in its first and more honourable, or in its second and ignobler, sense? Calling them Magi, does the evangelist mean to urge their wisdom or their magic? and is their coming a testimony and a foretaste of the manner in which all the highest wisdom of this world comes and does homage to Him, "who of God is made unto us wisdom," "in whom are hidden all treasures of wisdom and

up the matter with a Greek and an English Concordance will find that they have. At the same time, this rule of rendering the same word by the same cannot be of universal observance; inasmuch as oftentimes a word in one language will cover a much larger space, will fill a far wider sphere of meaning, than any of its partial equivalents in another. Thus, as Freund asks, What one German, and we may equally say, What one English word would embrace all the uses of the Latin *cano*? Or a word in one language may have a *duplicity* of meaning, which no equivalent in another possesses; may be able rapidly to change its front, to present itself now in a good sense, now in a bad, as none in another language can do. This is the case in the present instance; and, being so, there was no choice but to render *μάγος* here, and at Acts xiii, 6, 8, by different words. Any word which would have been appropriate here would have been inappropriate there, and *vice versâ*.

knowledge?" Or is it a renouncing of *wicked* arts in the person of the chief adepts thereof, a parallel to that later burning of their magical books on the part of the Ephesian converts, (Acts xix, 19,) a manifest token of the dissolution of all sorceries and charms before the simplicity of the Gospel; and, more generally, a preluding to the calling of great sinners, the Matthews, the Zacchæuses, and the like, to the knowledge of Christ?

In this last sense it has been understood by many;* and they can urge that, so far as

* Thus Ignatius (ad Ephes., c. 19) speaks of that star as one ὅθεν ἐλύετο πᾶσα μαγεία καὶ πᾶς δεσμὸς ἠφανίζετο κακίας, κ. τ. λ. Cf. Tertullian, De Idololat., c. 9; Hilary, De Trin., l. 4, § 38; and Origen, (Con. Cels., l. 1, c. 60,) who supposes that they guessed, from the failing of their spells, that a mightier than the evil spirits whom they served was born. And Augustine (in a sermon for epiphany, Serm. 200,): Manifestatus est [Dominus] in ipsis cunabulis infantiæ suæ his qui prope, et his qui longe, erant; Judæis in pastorum propinquitate, gentibus in magorum longinquitate. Illi ipso die quo natus est, isti ad eum hodie advenisse creduntur: manifestatus ergo est nec illis doctis, nec istis justis. Prævalet namque imperitia in rusticitate pastorum, et impietas in sacrilegiis magorum. Utrosque sibi lapis angularis applicuit, quippe qui venit stulta mundi eligere ut con-

New-Testament usage may have weight, wherever else it or its derivatives are there used, they are used only in a bad sense, and to express sorcerers and sorceries. Acts viii, 9, 11; xiii, 6, 8. Yet, considering the tendencies of this part of St. Matthew's narrative, and that he records this advent of theirs evidently as one of the gleams of glory which gild the lowly cradle of the new-born King;*

funderent sapientes, et non vocare justos sed peccatores, ut nullus magnus superbiret, nullus infimus desperaret. Such, too, was a common view in the middle ages. Thus Abelard (in Epiph. Dom., Serm. 4): Bene magi primitiæ gentium ad fidem primo tracti fuerunt, ut, qui, maxime erroris tenuerant magisterium, ipsi postmodum etiam suæ conversionis exemplo fidei facerent documentum. . . . Quis enim magos intantum detestandos esse ignoret, ut non solum ipsos, sed etiam quemlibet ad eos declinantem, lex interfici jubeat? Aquinas in like manner, (Sum. Theol., pars 3ª, qu. 36, art. 3): Manifestatus est justis, Simeoni et Annæ; et peccatoribus, scilicet magis. Crashaw's fine hymn on the epiphany rests throughout on this supposition.

* Bengel says, very beautifully, on the angelic annunciation of the Saviour's birth, (Luke ii, 9,) and the remark holds good also here, though there it has a yet greater fitness: "In omni humiliatione Christi, per decoram quandam protestationem cautum est gloriæ ejus divinæ. Hoc loco, per præconium angeli; in circumcisione, per nomen Jesu; in purificatione, per testimonium Simeonis; in baptismo, per exceptionem Bap-

seeing, too, that they are expressly called wise men "*from the east*," such as, in other words, belonged to the original and nobler stock of the Magi, and not to the later and degenerate offsets, I cannot doubt that the other is the truer view of his intention in giving to these visitors exactly this appellation which he does. "A greater than Solomon" was here; and these come, not, indeed, "to hear his wisdom," as other ambassadors of the heathen world had come to hear the wisdom of Solomon, (1 Kings x, 2, 3, 24; 2 Chron. ix, 23;) not this, for He, the Word, lay as yet without a word on his mother's breast; but still to acknowledge that He was the very wisdom of God. St. Matthew would set forth to us in them the highest human wisdom doing homage to the wisdom of God: refusing to walk in sparks of its own kindling, when in *his* light it could see light; but not, so far as this word goes, confessing its own perversity, nor any forbidden ways in which it had been hitherto walking: and our

tistæ; in passione, modis longe plurimis." He might have added Matt. xvii, 27.

translators have done wisely and well, as South remarks, in the word which they have selected, and in abstaining from using in this place any term which would have involved reproach. They, indeed, did but follow in this the earlier English versions, Tyndal, Cranmer, and the Geneva, which equally have "*wise men;*" (the Rhemish has "sages;") though at Acts xiii, 6, 8, our version has rightly translated the same word by "sorcerer."*

The wise men, then, were not the professors of an evil magic; but, on the other hand, we have as little ground to account them kings, as the Romish Church has made it almost an article of faith that they were. Maldonatus, who shows often a hardly suppressed contempt for the untenable traditions

* The word occurs four times in Theodotion's version of Daniel, (i, 20; ii, 2, 27; iv, 4,) and certainly with no dishonourable meaning attached to it. Comparing Dan. iv, 4 with the preceding verse, we see that the *μάγοι* (= אַשָּׁפִים) were one division of the *σοφοί*. It is used by Aquila (1 Sam. xxviii, 8, 9; Isa. xxix, 4) as = אֹבוֹת; and by Symmachus (Gen. xli, 8) as = חַרְטֻמִּים = *ἱερογραμματεῖς*.

of his own Church, yet here storms against some heretical interpreters, who refused them this dignity; although he himself ends with confessing that it is only a probable opinion, and that by kings he means, not so much rulers of empires as sheiks or emirs, *reguli*, and not *reges*. Doubtless, at a very early date it began to be usual to attribute to them these royal honours. The passages that mainly contributed thereto, and that served as the chief support for this opinion, were Isa. lx, 3: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and *kings* to the brightness of thy rising," in combination with Psa. lxxii, 10, 11: "The *kings* of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the *kings* of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all *kings* shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him." Thus Tertullian twice quotes this last passage, as having its perfect fulfilment in the adoration of Christ by these wise men from the East;* while Hilary† also calls

* Adv. Jud., c. 9; Con. Marcion., l. 3, c. 13; with this explanation: Nam et magos reges fere habuit Oriens.

† De Trin., l. 4, § 38. Another Scripture of which he makes ingenious adaptation to this coming of the Magi,

them princes, and quotes this last passage, without apparently any doubt that it, as so many more, found now its fulfilment. It needs not to observe how universally this belief prevailed in the middle ages, so that it gave to Epiphany one of the titles by which it was most commonly designated, namely, the feast of the three kings,—nor how Christian art, poetry, and painting alike, were, and in part are still, penetrated with it,—nor yet how innumerable are the legends which turn on the kingly dignity of these august visitors.*

But not only was it made almost into an article of faith that they were kings, but also

and which he finds fulfilled therein, is Isa. xlv. 14. "The labour of Egypt" is the idolatry which they renounced; "the merchandise of Ethiopia and the Sabeans," the gifts which they offered.

* Festum trium regum, principum, dynastarum; so in the Christian hymn:—

> *Reges* de Sabâ veniunt,
> Aurum, thus, myrrham offerunt:

And again:—

> Natus est Rex gloriæ,
> Ad quem *reges* ambulabant,
> Aurum, myrrham, thus portabant.

their number, about which St. Matthew is silent, was determined. In the Eastern Church, indeed, though chiefly among the Nestorians, they were sometimes said to be twelve; but three was far more predominantly esteemed their number. By-and-by their very names were known—Melchior, Caspar, and Balthazar;* I believe Bede is the first who acquaints us with these: and they were considered severally to represent the three groups of mankind; Melchior representing the family of Shem, Caspar of Ham, (generally, therefore, portrayed, in Christian art, with the dark hues of a Moor or Ethiopian,) and Balthazar of Japhet. I think it probable that this contemplating of them as representatives of the three races was rather an afterthought; and the more immediate inducement to the counting them three, lay in the threefold gifts which they offered.†

* Yet these are not the only names they have borne; for others, see Hebenstreit, De Magorum Nomine, Patriâ, et Statu Dissert., Jenæ, 1709.

† So Leo the Great, (De Epiph., Serm. I., 4–7;) and Abelard, (Serm. in Epiph., p. 771:) Quot vero isti magi

The relation is a very interesting one in which these Magi of St. Matthew stand to the shepherds of St. Luke, (ii, 8–18.) They may in many aspects be co-ordinated with one another; for if those shepherds are the first-fruits of the Jewish nation doing homage to their own King, exactly so are those wise men the first-fruits of the heathen world* doing homage to that King, who, in that He was "*King of the Jews*," was also their King and the King of all. Their coming, and that of the shepherds, to the same point, and to the same presence, was the prophecy, with, indeed, its commencing fulfilment, of Gentile and Jew, of them who were far off, and them who were near, that should meet in Christ, as in the one corner-stone; in whom both were one, in whom they should lay aside their oppositions and enmities, and be knit as into a single body and building. Here was already the pledge of the mystery,

fuerint, ex numero trinæ oblationis tres eos fuisse multi suspicantur.

* Aquinas, (Summ. Theol., iii, 36, 8:) In magis apparuit sicut in quodam præsagio fides et devotio gentium venientium a remotis ad Christum.

whereof the apostle of the Gentiles afterward more fully spoke. Ephes. ii, 17.*

Nor is it uninstructive to compare the guidance by which they and the shepherds, respectively, are brought to the presence of the new-born King. The shepherds, as of Jewish extraction, are guided by an angel; but the wise men, as Gentiles, by a star: those by revelation, which was familiar to them; these by nature, with the aspects of which *they* were familiar: but thus, whether by an angel or a star, in either case the words of the Psalmist were fulfilled, and "*the*

* A fanciful application was often made in the early Church of the prophecy of Isa. i, 3. The Jew and Gentile who recognised the dignity of the occupant of that manger, were severally the ox and the ass, that know their owner and their master's crib. Thus Augustine, (Serm. 375:) In eis cœpit bos agnoscere possessorem suum, et asinus præsepe domini sui. . . . Bos de Judæis, asinus de gentibus: ambo ad unum præsepe venerunt, et verbi cibaria invenerunt. So, too, the words of the Christmas hymn,

Cognovit bos et asinus
Quod puer erat Dominus,

make probably allusion to this, as well as to the legend that the dumb animals did obeisance to, and after their fashion worshipped, the infant Lord.

heavens declared the glory of God."* There was a fitness, too, in the fact of the shepherds, who were the representatives of the Jews, of them therefore that were near, making their appearance on the very day of the nativity, while the wise men, who, like the whole Gentile world, came from afar, certainly did not appear till a much later day—how much later we may presently inquire.†

Nor should we fail to observe, that while there would have been a certain fitness in the

* Gregory the Great, (Hom. 10 in Evang.:) Quærendum nobis est, quidnam sit quòd, Redemptore nato, pastoribus in Judæâ angelus apparuit, et ad adorandum hunc ab oriente magos non angelus sed stella perduxit? Quia videlicet Judæis tanquam ratione utentibus, rationale animal, id est angelus, prædicare debuit: Gentiles vero, quia uti ratione nesciebant, ad cognoscendum Dominum non per vocem, sed per signa perducuntur. Unde etiam per Paulum dicitur: Prophetiæ fidelibus datæ sunt, non infidelibus; signa autem infidelibus, non fidelibus.

† Thus Augustine in a sermon on Epiphany (Sermon 204): Quia ergo Pax venerat eis qui erant longe, et Pax eis qui erant prope, pastores Israelitæ tanquam prope inventi, eo die quo natus est Christus, ad eum venerunt, viderunt et exsultaverunt: Magi autem Gentiles, tanquam longe inventi, tot diebus interpositis ab illo quo natus est, hodie pervenerunt, invenerunt, adoraverunt.

use of any natural helps, whereby to beckon and invite these children of nature into the kingdom of grace, yet was there an especial fitness in this one which it pleased God to use—for these watchers of the heavens, a star; and if we are to suppose that the foolishness of astrology mingled itself with their speculations, this would only be another proof of that grace of God whereby he uses oftentimes even men's errors to deliver them out of error into the kingdom of the truth. On the star for the star-gazers, and on other similar dealings of God's grace, Donne has beautifully said:—"God speaks in such forms and such phrases as may most work upon them to whom he speaks. Of David, that was a shepherd before, God says, he took him to feed his people. To those Magi of the East who were given to the study of the stars, God gave a Star to be their guide to Christ at Bethlehem. To those who followed him to Capernaum for meat, Christ took occasion by that to preach to them of the spiritual food of their souls. To the Samaritan woman whom he found at the well, he

preached of the water of life. Beloved, Christ puts no man out of his way (for sinful courses are no ways, but continual deviations) to go to heaven. Christ makes heaven all things to all men that he might gain all."

The remarkable symmetry which the two comings, that of the shepherds and the Magi, contemplated in this relation to one another, present—the manner in which they serve mutually as the complement each of the other, would of itself render suspicious any interpretation of the last, by which these harmonies and this symmetry would be disturbed or lost. There is, however, such a theory about it: for there have been, at different times, those who have seen in these Magi the representatives, not of the Gentiles, but of the ten tribes. But not to urge that the entire traditional interpretation of the Church is against this view, nor yet that this visit of theirs is thus robbed, in great part, of that deeper significance which now it has, this scheme proceeds on the assumption, that the distinction between the ten tribes and the two survived the exile,—that the former still

enjoyed a separate corporate existence; whereas all evidence goes to prove that, in the exile, the distinction, which had been mainly political, and of which, as being such, the motives existed no longer, was broken down. In their common distress, they and the two tribes returned, as far as it was then possible, into national and ecclesiastical fellowship with one another; and although, when permission to return into their own land was given, it naturally befell that many more of Judah, and Benjamin, and Levi availed themselves of it than of those carried away more than a century before them, yet to these there attached themselves not a few out of the ten tribes. The permission is explicitly to all the nation. (Ezra i, 3.) Those who return contemplate themselves as representing, not a section of the nation, but the whole; they "offered for a sin-offering for *all* Israel *twelve* he-goats." Ezra vi, 17; viii, 35. St. Paul speaks of the nation existing in his day as "our *twelve* tribes," (Acts xxvi, 7;) and the word expresses yet more strongly in the original the unbroken unity of the

twelve.* St. James also, addressing himself to such portions of the nation as dwelt beyond the limits of the Holy Land, does not assume that the ten tribes had disappeared beyond the range of vision, and had been altogether lost sight of, or that they stood on any different footing from the two, but embraces all alike in a common salutation, which is addressed "to the *twelve* tribes in the dispersion." James i, 1.

If, against this evidence, any should yet affirm that the ten tribes maintained a separate existence, and had not reunited with their brethren, in this case the appellation, "*King of the Jews*," under which these visitors ask for the new-born Child, would of itself be quite decisive that *they* were not delegates from them. Ambassadors of theirs would never have given the question at issue between themselves and the two tribes so altogether against themselves as in this question it is done; or, at least, would certainly have never asked for the new-born King in

* Τὸ δωδεκάφυλον ἡμῶν=τὸ δωδεκάσκηπτρον τοῦ Ἰσραήλ. Clem. Rom., Ep. 1, c. 31.

language which implied that He did not belong by nearest right to themselves as well as to the Jews.[2] They would have asked for him as "*King of Israel*," which they would have known was at once the theocratic name, (John i, 50; xii, 13;) and that which included all members of the *δωδεκάφυλον* (twelve tribes) as having their equal share in Him; and not as "*King of the Jews*," thus bringing forward a single tribe, and that the rival one, as though it represented and embraced the whole nation. The question as it now stands, the title, "*King of the Jews*," most natural on the lips of a Gentile, who would take the nation as he actually found it, and with very slightest knowledge of its antecedent history, (thus see Matt. xxvii, 11, 29, 37, and compare verse 42 of the same chap-

[2] It needs not to observe that Ἰουδαῖοι (= יְהוּדִים) was a name derived from Ἰούδας, the patriarch Judah; see Josephus, Ant., xi, 5, 4; who is not, however, quite correct in saying that it first sprung up after the return from Babylon; rather it seems to have come into use, and would naturally have done so after the carrying away of the ten tribes into captivity. Jer. xxxii, 12; xxxiv, 9; xxxviii, 19; xl, 11; xliii, 9.

ter,) would have been quite unsuitable in the mouth of any actual member of the nation: least of all would it have been used by them whom the very name, so far as it went, excluded from having part and lot in this King. To have used it would have involved the same contradiction, the same denial on their part of their own position, as would our giving to Romanists the title of Catholics.

§ 2.—*The Symbol of the Star.*

Thus much in regard of these Magi, who and what they were. No doubt when they came to Jerusalem, saying, "*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*" they had taken for granted that the royal Child would have been born in the royal city, and that they should find him there. For not as yet was revealed to them that mysterious law which, running through all events of the kingdom of God, repeated itself in this—that law, according to which the weak things of the world are ever chosen to confound the things that are mighty,—lowly Bethlehem

before haughty Jerusalem,—even as this little planet of ours before far vaster worlds, as the sphere in which the great mystery of redemption should be accomplished. Jerusalem, indeed, shall have the guilt of the Lord's death, but Bethlehem the glory of his birth. And as they looked to find him in the royal city, so, it would seem, as well in the royal palace. There, probably, their first inquiries were made; and thus it may have come to pass that the tidings of their coming, and of the question with which they came, so quickly reached the ears of the usurper that now sat upon David's throne.

But on what grounds do they rest their confident expectation that this King was born? "*For we have seen his Star in the East.*" That the great events of this world were not without their corresponding appearances in the heavenly world, appearances which manifested themselves especially in the stars, was a wide-spread conviction of antiquity, which possessed its truth, however often it may have been drawn down into the service of superstition and error. In the life

of the Redeemer, the presentiment which found its utterance in this belief, won first its full reality and truth. Its partial truth it already had: for we cannot set to the account of accident or imagination all those remarkable coincidences between heaven and earth, all those testimonies which the signs and tokens of heaven have so often yielded, and men taken note of, that the great of this world do not come or go without warning. This, indeed, is but one aspect of that sympathy, so deep and so earnest, which we may trace as everywhere existing between nature and man. The former is not to the latter as a dead horse under a living rider, but one thought, one life, one purpose, proceeding indeed from the higher to the lower, animates them both. At no time does nature put on a careless, unmeaning face, when aught that intimately concerns her foster-child man is being done, nor make as though this was nothing unto her. On the contrary, her history runs parallel, and is subordinate, to his, —the great moments in the life of nature concurring with the great moments in the

life of man, and therefore most of all with the great crises of the kingdom of God, which concern him the nearest of all. Thus, during all those hours that the Son of God hung upon the cross, there was darkness over the whole earth; nature shuddered to her very centre at the moment when he expired, (Matt. xxvii, 45, 51, 52;) for it was *her* King, as well as man's, that died. And not otherwise we conclude that the coming of the Son of Man to judgment will be coincident and connected with a great organic transformation of this natural world on which we live. Its hidden fires shall break forth: it shall be no longer a fit dwelling-place for man as he now is: the natural and the spiritual Æon shall have come simultaneously to their close.

But this subordination of natural to spiritual epochs—these tokens of nature's sympathy with man, are not limited, any more than are his destinies, merely to the planet which he actually inhabits. The great shakings of the nations, the fear and the perplexity which shall go before that day of Christ's second coming, shall be accompanied

with like signs of distress in the heavenly world: "The powers," not of earth only, but "of the heavens shall be shaken, (Matt. xxiv, 29;) there shall be some great perturbation and derangement of the fixed laws by which the celestial bodies have hitherto been holden each in its appointed orbit and place. Everywhere in that planetary system of which this earth is the heart and moral centre, there shall be troubled echoes of the great discords of humanity. The sickness of fear which overspreads the faces of men shall spread darkness also over the lights of heaven. Matt. xxiv, 29; cf. Isa. xiii, 9, 10; xxiv, 20, 23; xxxiv, 4; Ezek. xxxii, 7, 8; Joel ii, 30, 31; Haggai ii, 7. And as then it will be in the heaven, so already has it been,—though indeed with a difference. For if these distressful signs in the firmament of our heaven shall be fit prognostics of "the great and terrible day of the Lord," it beseemed him with quite another sign to fore-announce that other coming, which should be only with glad tidings of great joy to all people. That new thing upon earth was more fitly fore-an-

nounced by the calm and silent splendour of a new Star in the heaven—a Star, as we may well believe, larger, lovelier, and brighter than any of the hosts of heaven; even as He of whom it told was so far fairer than all the angels of God *from* whom, or children of men *to* whom, he came.

This very symbol of the star, which had its partial fitness when regarded as the herald of any great and glorious birth among men,—how entire a fitness did it now possess, shining out in the heaven as heaven's natural evangelist of the highest and holiest birth in time! Himself "the bright and morning Star," (Rev. xxii, 16; cf. ii, 28,) he found in this symbol that which, better than any other among the works of his own hands, was adapted to set forth, however weakly even it could do it, his unsullied purity, his transcendant brightness,* his infinite exaltation

* We have many allusions to the surpassing brightness of this star. Thus Ignatius (Ad Ephes. c. 19): Πῶς οὖν ἐφανερώθη [ὁ Κύριος] τοῖς αἰῶσι; Ἀστὴρ ἐν οὐρανῷ ἔλαμψεν ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς ἀστέρας, καὶ τὸ φῶς αὐτοῦ ἀνεκλάλητον ἦν, καὶ ξενισμὸν παρεῖχεν ἡ καινότης αὐτοῦ. Τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ πάντα ἄστρα, ἅμα ἡλίῳ καὶ σελήνῃ χορὸς ἐγένετο

above all the tumults and confusions of this earth of ours. For, to quote the words of South: "There are spots (they say) not in the moon only, but also in the face of the sun itself: but this Star was of a greater and more unblemished lustre; for not the least spot was ever discovered in it, though malice and envy itself were the perspectives

τῷ ἀστέρι· αὐτὸς δὲ ἦν ὑπερβάλλων τὸ φῶς αὐτοῦ ὑπὲρ πάντα. In the choir which the sun, and moon, and stars form around this brightest one, we have a manifest blending of elements drawn from Joseph's dream, (Gen. xxxvii, 9.) with the narration of the evangelist; perhaps an unconscious reminiscence of that on the part of Ignatius. Thus, too, in the apocryphal *Protevangelium Jacobi*, § 21, the Magians reply to Herod: Εἴδομεν ἀστέρα παμμεγέθη, λάμψαντα ἐν τοῖς ἄστροις τούτοις καὶ ἀμβλύνοντα αὐτοὺς τοῦ φαίνειν. (Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*, p. 257; see also p. 390.) And Prudentius, in his noble twelfth Cathemerinon:—

Hæc stella, quæ solis rotam
Vincit decore ac lumine,
Venisse terris nunciat
Cum carne terrestri Deum.

En Persici ex orbis sinu,
Sol unde sumit januam,
Cernunt periti interpretes
Regale vexillum magi:

Quod ut refulsit, ceteri
Cessere signorum globi,
Nec pulcher est ausus suam
Conferre formam lucifer.

through which most of the world beheld it. And as it is the privilege of the celestial luminaries to receive no tincture, suillage, or defilement from the most noisome sinks and dung-hills here below, but to maintain a pure, untainted, virgin light, in spite of all their exhalations; so our Saviour shined in the world with such an invincible light of holiness, as suffered nothing of the corrupt manners and depraved converse of men to rub the least filth or pollution upon him."*

That men should have anticipated this symbol, and snatched at it before, is nothing strange. If they had not so done, this would have been almost of itself an argument that it did not possess that highest fitness which indeed it does. Coming, as did the Son of God, in the end of time, it lay in the necessity of things that these signs and symbols, with indeed much that lay yet nearer to the

* From the exquisitely beautiful conclusion of a sermon on this text: "I am the Root and Offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star."—*South's Sermons*, 1727, v. 3, p. 281–292.

heart of the truth, should have been in a measure pre-occupied by others, that what was truly given in Him—the glory which, in all its fulness, arrayed his person, and centred in it—should have been in some small measure actually lent, or should have been imagined to have been lent, to others that went before him.* Thus, to take but a single, yet an illustrious, example. The heathen religions boasted of their virgin-born, as of Buddha and Zoroaster, as of Pythagoras and Plato. It much concerns us to determine in what relation and connexion we will put their legend and our history; whether we will use the truth to show that the falsehood was not

* Wetstein (*in loc.*) has a rich collection of passages gathered from heathen antiquity, which put the appearance of a star, comet, or other celestial phenomenon, in relation with the birth of some illustrious personage. One may suffice (Justin, Hist., 37, 2): Hujus [Mithridatis] futuram magnitudinem etiam cœlestia ostenta prædixerant. Nam eo quo genitus est anno, et quo regnare primum cœpit, stella cometes per utrumque tempus LXX. diebus ita luxit, ut cœlum omne conflagrare videretur.—The star which was believed to have announced Julius Cæsar's heavenly birth, his adoption among the gods, is well known. (Suetonius, Cæsar, 88; Virgil, Ecl., 9, 47; Pliny, H. N., l. 2, c. 23.)

all falsehood, and for the detecting the golden grains of a true anticipation which lay concealed amid all its dross; or whether we will suffer the falsehoods to cast a slight and suspicion upon the truth, as though that was but the crowning falsehood of them all. In the present position of the controversy with infidelity, we cannot let these parallels alone if we would,—even if we were willing to forego the precious witness for the glory and truth of the Christian faith which they contain. We cannot ignore them: if they are not for us, they will be used against us. But they are for us; since we may justly ask,—and it is no playing with imperfect analogies, for the question may be transferred from the natural to the spiritual world,—Are the parhelia, however numerous, to be accepted as evidences that all is optical illusion—that there is no such true body of light as the sun after all; or, rather, does not the very fact of their delusively painting the horizon, tell of and announce a sun, which is surely travelling up from behind?

In the present case, this star I conceive, as

so many ancients* and moderns have done, to have been a new star† in the heavens.

* Thus Eusebius (Demonst. Evang., l. 8,): Ξένος καὶ οὐ συνήθης οὐδὲ τῶν πολλῶν καὶ γνωρίμων εἰς, ἀλλά τις καινὸς καὶ νέος ἀστὴρ ἐπιφανεὶς τῷ βίῳ σημεῖον ξένου Φωστῆρος ἐδήλου καταλάμψαντος τῷ παντὶ κόσμῳ, ὃς ἦν ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, μέγας καὶ νέος ἀστὴρ, οὗ τὴν εἰκονα συμβολικῶς ὁ φανεὶς τότε τοῖς μάγοις ἐπεφέρετο. And Augustine (Con. Faust., l. 2, c. 5,): Novo Virginis partu novum sidus apparuit: non ex illis erat hæc stellis, quæ ab initio creaturæ itinerum suorum ordinem sub creatoris lege custodiunt. Cf. Ambrose, Exp. in Luc., l. 2, c. 48; Origen, Con. Cels., l. 1, c. 58.

† Some, as is well known, have supposed it to have been, not so much a single star, as a constellation. But certainly the word with which it is designated by St. Matthew lends no support to this view, but rather excludes it. Throughout the chapter it is *ἀστήρ*, and not *ἄστρον*. These words differ from one another in the same way as *stella* and *sidus* (=εἶδος,) in Latin; *Stern* and *Gestirn*, in German; *star* and *constellation*, in English; the first being one of the single luminaries of the sky, the second, like Orion or the Pleiades, a group or complex of stars. The further distinction which exists in the Latin between *stella* and *astrum*, that *stella* is one of the common multitude of the heavenly host, *astrum* one of its brighter luminaries, comes not here into account. But while *ἀστήρ* and *ἄστρον*, *stella* and *sidus*, may be thus distinguished, it must, at the same time, be acknowledged that, even by the best writers, alike in Greek and in Latin, the distinction is often neglected, although much oftener in making *ἄστρον* and *sidus* to stand for some single star than the converse. (Döderlein's Synonyme, v. 4, p. 409.)

Such would most fitly have announced a new thing—that a virgin should conceive, that God should be with us. And I cannot but think that the language of the wise men implies as much, whose attention certainly no other signal in the heaven would have been at all so well fitted to arouse. It would be no sufficient objection, even if it could be clearly shown, that the appearance of such new stars was altogether unheard of, and without precedent. For that which this star announced was new, and without precedent as well. But it is, in fact, very far from so being. Not only does there manifest itself a tendency in the more luminous nebulæ of the starry heaven, as Herschel has so gloriously described, to consolidate and mass themselves into spheres, such as should take their place by entire right among the heavenly bodies; not only are there even now stars thus in process of formation, but we possess authentic records of the sudden appearance of such stars, and those of the very first magnitude, shining out with a brightness and brilliancy almost unknown to the habitual denizens of

the sky—stars which, after a longer or shorter period, have again gradually gone out, or suddenly left their places, so that no trace has ever been discovered of them since. More than once such stars have excited no small amount of attention and admiration.* Among the more illustrious in modern times is the star called Tycho Brahe's, he having first given an astronomical report about it. Nor will it, I think, be without interest, nor alien to the matter in hand, to offer here a few notices of this stranger in the heaven, the stages of whose brief, and, at first, so glorious existence, have found more than one careful chronicler.† It shone out suddenly in Cassiopeia on the night of Nov. 11, 1572. At the beginning, it surpassed in apparent size all the fixed stars, even those of the first magnitude, and thus even Sirius and the Lyre. Indeed, it somewhat exceeded even the planet Jupiter, which was then approach-

* This had not missed the attention of the ancient astronomers. Thus Pliny (H. N., l. 2, c. 22,): In ipso cœlo stellæ repente nascuntur.

† Von Littrow, Die Wúnder der Himmels, p. 227; Pfaff, Der Mensch und die Sterne.

ing the earth, and larger than usual, so that it came very near to the splendour of Venus, when nearest to the earth, and at its fullest and brightest. For a season, almost through the whole of November, it retained, well nigh without diminution, this its majestic fulness of light, so that it was distinctly seen by many whose vision was acute, in the day-time, even at mid-day itself—which, with the exception of Venus, is the case with no other star; and in the night-time, if the clouds were not too thick, it shone through them, while the other stars remained obscured. Yet this superiority of size it did not retain through its whole duration; but by gradual defect it became smaller, till it vanished altogether. And in the same manner as in the course of its existence it changed its visible bulk by a progressive diminution, even so it did not throughout display the same innate complexion of light with which it showed at its birth. At the beginning, while in magnitude it rivalled Venus and Jupiter, its light was white, clear-shining, of a mild and gracious aspect, like that of these two beneficent

planets. Afterwards, this splendid appearance was altered through a certain yellowish tinge, until, early in the spring of 1573, it degenerated into a red, like that of Mars or Aldebaran. Towards the end of the spring, and notably in May, it assumed a gray colour running into a leaden blue, such as shows itself in Saturn. This colour it retained almost to the last, only that ever, as it approached its end, the light it gave was duller, dimmer, and more troubled. In its twinkling it did not resemble the planets; it had this in common with the fixed stars. It finally seemed to go out in March, 1574, sixteen months after it was first seen; nor have the slightest traces of it been discovered since.

Keppler's star, which appeared thirty-two years later, in 1604, excited perhaps even more attention, from its magnitude, the remarkable character as well as brilliancy of its light, the period of its appearing, and the significant position among the chiefest planets which it occupied in the heavens. These last circumstances were the occasion of some deeply interesting speculations on the part of Keppler,

§ 3.—*The Import of the Symbol.*

But, with all this, there still remains the question, what were the connecting links between seeing a star, and concluding that a "*King of the Jews*" was born? And this

tions of Keppler's; but I would not pass them altogether by, seeing that modern astronomers and chronologists recur with no little interest to them. Munter, the learned Danish bishop, in his little book, Der Stern der Weisen, (Copenhagen, 1827,) was the first to call renewed attention to them; whom Ideler (Handb. der Chronol., 2, 339 seq.) and Wieseler, (Chronol. Synopse, pp. 62 seq.) follow. Certainly Keppler so tells his tale, that even one who is altogether a layman in these matters may yet find pleasure in following him; as when he is setting forth the important position which his star occupied among the heavenly bodies, as compared with the earlier of Tycho Brahe (De Stellâ Novâ; Pragæ, 1606, p. 125): Præcipua vero et consideratione dignissima dissimilitudo fuit in loco et tempore. Illa enim extra limites Zodiaci fulsit, in sidere Cassiopeiæ, loco cœli infrequenti, nec ullis planetarum accessionibus nobilitato: hæc stationem sibi elegit proxime viam regiam solis, lunæ, ceterorumque planetarum; sic ut ab omnibus planetis salutaretur; Saturno vero pæne corporaliter jungeretur. Illam etsi claræ aliquot stellæ in Cassiopeiâ secundæ magnitudinis circumstabant, vulgares tamen illæ fuerunt, et de promiscuo fixarum numero, nullâ proprii motûs nobilitate insignes: hæc nostra vero in medium trium superiorum planetarum sese ingessit, Jove et Marte satellitibus

brings us at once to the consideration of another question, and one which has much divided interpreters—namely, whether this Star of the wise men stands in any relation to

anteambulonibus, Saturno stipatore pedissequo usa .... Illa vulgare et ignobile tempus invasit, nullâ peculiari notâ insigne; hæc incidit in eum præcise annum, quem astrologi universi Trigoni ignei principio, eventurisque prodigiis cœlestibus, diligentissimis prænonitionibus designarant; ..... in eum præcise cœli locum, ad quem omnium astrologorum oculi congressum Jovis et Martis exspectantes, dirigebantur. Itaque prior illa mundo non prænonito supervenit, et velut improvisus hostis, occupatis urbis mœniis, prius in foro comparuit, quam cives expeditionem ejus famâ percepissent; nostra vero vulgo expectata a longo tempore, cum multâ solennitate et triumphali pompâ ad diem constitutum est ingressa; more præpotentis alicujus monarchæ, qui metropolim regni invisurus, præmissis longe antea metatoribus, loca comitatui designat.

I have already alluded to the surpassing brightness which so many ascribed, and, as I cannot doubt, rightly, to that Star, the symbol of Him who was Himself "the brightness of his Father's glory," Himself "the bright and morning Star." It may be worth while to quote one or two out of many passages, in which Keppler tries to tell out something of the impression which the extraordinary brilliancy of this star made on himself and on others that beheld it. It may help us a little to realize the wonder and admiration with which that flaming standard in the heavens must have been watched by those eastern sages, and by all whose eyes had been drawn toward it. Thus, in a work published in the year

the Star which Balaam in spirit saw, the Star which should come out of Jacob, and of which he foretold; (Num. xxiv, 17;) and if so, in what? Was there now a fulfilment of that prophecy? Nay more: did the Magi, speaking of "*his Star*," allude to such a prophecy,—which must in that case have been committed to writing, and thus have survived in the East? Did they mean to affirm that now at length that mysterious word, which another wise man from the East, and one, like themselves, beyond the pale of the elect nation, one therefore, whose spiritual successors* they

subsequent to its disappearance (De Vero Anno Nat. Christi, 1606, p. 3): Quisquis es qui portentum stupendum oculis tuis non aspexisti, facem imaginare tibi flagrantissimam luminis purissimi, ventis validissimis agitatam et quassatam; talis erat vibratio luminis, talis flammarum ebullitio, talis scintillatio ignivoma rapidissima. Compare De Stellâ Novâ, 1606: De specie stellæ convenit omnibus, fuisse stellis fixis simillimam, radiis undequaque ut fixarum emicantibus, scintillatione clarissimâ, coruscatione seu vibratione tam rapidâ, ut negaverint quidam sibi dum viverent, unquam quicquam in cœlo visum esse æque pernici motu, ut ipsi loquebantur.

* Jerome: Balaam, cujus successores erant. On the significant position of Balaam, as he in whom "set the sun of prophecy in the horizon of the Gentile world," and on the many probabilities that his prophecies, especially

were, had spoken, was fulfilled? If so, we have the connexion at once.

Many in old time have asserted both—namely, that this Star did in the intentions of God stand in such a connexion, as the fulfilment of that foregoing word; and also that these inquirers from the East, among whom the prophecy of Balaam had survived independently of Scripture, meant in those words of theirs, "*We have seen his Star*," speaking of it as one well known, to allude to, and themselves to affirm, such a connexion; so that their "*We have seen*" is the complement of his "I shall see."* Thus Origen;† Jerome

those at Shittim, were reduced to writing among the Moabites and the Midianites, I would refer the reader to Bishop Horsley's most interesting Dissertation, "On the Prophecies of the Messiah dispersed among the heathen." Sermons, 1829, v. 2, pp. 297–312.

* Ambrose (in Luc., l. 2, c. 48): Ille stellam vidit in spiritu, isti viderunt oculis. Calov: Quam vidisse Bileam in posteris suis dici potest, nempe in magis ex oriente ad præsepe Domini perductis.

† Con. Cels., l. 1, c. 60; and in his thirteenth Sermon on Numbers, which has come down to us only in a Latin translation: Si enim a Mose prophetiæ ejus [Balaami] sacris insertæ sunt voluminibus, quanto magis descriptæ sunt ab iis, qui habitabant tunc Mesopotamiam, apud quos magnificus habebatur Balaam, quosque artis ejus

also, and many more among the ancients.* In modern times, the relation has been denied by most,† but has been re-affirmed with great ingenuity by Hengstenberg. His line of argument is this: starting with, and taking for granted, as indeed is admitted by all, that one of St. Matthew's chief purposes in his Gospel was to show how the New Testament rooted itself in the Old, was the perfect flower which unfolded itself out of that stalk and stem, he urges that in these first two chapters especially, it was the Evangelist's purpose to bring out the fulfilment of prophecy in Him whom the Church had acknowledged as the Christ. St.

constat fuisse discipulos? Ex illo denique fertur magorum gens et institutio in partibus Orientis vigere; qui descripta habentes apud se omnia, quæ prophetaverat Balaam, etiam hoc habuerunt scriptum, quod *orietur Stella ex Jacob, et exsurget homo ex Israël.* Hæc scripta habebant magi apud semet ipsos, et ideo, quando natus est Jesus, agnoverunt stellam, et intellexerunt adimpleri prophetiam.

* Theophylact detects, for instance, but with no great probability, as it appears to me, in the *ἀνατέταλκεν* of Heb. vii, 14, an allusion to the *Ἀνατελεῖ ἄστρον ἐξ Ἰακώβ*: saying, *Σεμνὴ ἡ λέξις τὸ Ἀνατέταλκε, καὶ ἐκ τῆς τοῦ Βαλαὰμ προφητείας ληφθεῖσα.*

† See Spanheim, Dub. Evang., v. 2, p. 369.

Matthew is not writing in any sense an *Evangelium Infantiæ;* which, in a certain sense, St. Luke may be affirmed to have done: and the difficulties in harmonizing the two narratives arise in good part from the assumption that he is, that he has the same intention as St. Luke has; while, indeed, quite another law guides his selection of the facts which he records. He does not write, but he assumes, the history. His facts are only and exclusively those in which he can bring out marked fulfilments of Old Testament prophecies, and only so much of them as is necessary for this. "*That it might be fulfilled,*" expressed or understood, runs through the whole of these two chapters—expressed, I say, *or understood;* for while often expressed, (as i, 22; ii, 15, 17, 23,) so also not seldom understood. Writing as he does for Hebrew converts, who were familiar with the Old Testament, who had lived and moved in it from their childhood, who had drawn it in with their mother's milk—to whom, therefore, the slightest hint would be sufficient,—he does not always count it necessary to refer in as many words to the type or

prophecy which was now fulfilled; being the rather confident that they would not miss it, and would be only the better pleased at having something left to themselves, some claim made upon their own mental activity. As such intimations and implicit allusions, he notes the mention of the gifts, whereof two, the gold and the frankincense, had been expressly named in one of the passages, to which he believes Matthew would here send back his readers, Ps. lxxii, 10; Isa. lx, 6; or once more, the angel's word to Joseph, "*They are dead who sought the young Child's life*," words which, to one that understood, would at once place the fortunes of this Child in mysterious relation with the fortunes of the former great deliverer of Israel; (Exod. iv, 19;) a subject on which there will be occasion to say something more presently.

If this, then, is St. Matthew's law of selection, and Hengstenberg maintains with great ingenuity, and, in the main, success, that it does hold good in every other circumstance and incident mentioned in these chapters, so that nothing is told except in its bearing, and

for the sake of its bearing, on some prophetic word or event that went before, how inconceivable it is that there should be one exception to this, and that one the so prominent fact of the Star; that it, and it alone, should hold on to nothing which preceded. But if it does involve an allusion to any Old Testament fact or prophecy, it must needs be to that of Balaam, since there is no other that the Evangelist could possibly have had in his eye. Only in that single passage does the Messiah stand in any relation to, or appear in any way symbolized by, a star. But that in that passage he does so, that the Star there is no other than Christ Himself, is plain from his claiming of this very title as his own, in some of the last words of the New Testament: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright and morning Star." (Rev. xxii. 16.)*

That the Jews understood that prophecy of Balaam to refer to the Christ, they gave fear-

* Ambrose (Exp. in Luc. l. 2, § 45) brings the three passages, Num. xxiv, 17, Matt. ii, 2, and Rev. xxii, 16, into relation with another: Ubi Christus, et Stella est: ipse enim est Stella splendida et matutina. Suâ igitur ipse luce se signat.

ful witness. The false Christ, who under Adrian took up arms for the last terrible struggle with Rome, gave himself out as the Messiah whom Balaam had foretold; and assumed the name of Barchochab, or, the Son of the Star, for the purpose of placing himself in nearer connexion with that prophecy; which we know, from contemporary Jewish writings, that the famous Rabbi Akiba interpreted with reference to him.* It is certainly remarkable as well, that the Jew who supplied Celsus with his account of the coming of the Magi,—Chaldæans he calls them, but evidently his account is drawn from St. Matthew,—should have dropped all mention of the Star as the motive of their coming; they were, he says, moved† to come, but he does not say how. This omission may be otherwise explained; but it looks as if his inducement to keep back the Star altogether, was a fear lest its mention might put the Child of Bethlehem into too close a relation with a recognised Messianic prophecy of the Old Testament. Such instances of a

* Eusebius, H. E., l. 14, c. 6.

† Κινηθέντας. (Origen, Con. Cels., l. 1, c. 58.)

bad conscience in their controversy with Christians are sufficiently frequent among the Jews.

Whether this explanation of the matter be the right one or not, no one, I think, should finally reject it, without having read Horsley's Dissertation, to which reference has been already made, and weighed the arguments therein brought forward. But granting it mistaken, and that these wise men were not by these ancient oracles taught what was the meaning of that glorious signal in the heavens, yet the time being what it was, and they being what they were, how little would have been sufficient to instruct them in its meaning! It was a time when, if we may slightly alter the Apostle's words, "the earnest expectation of the creature waited for the manifestation of the Son of God;" it was the world's great emptiness, which, in the purposes of the eternal Wisdom, preceded, as a negative preparation, the great fulness that was coming; the time of an infinite longing, that prepared men for the infinite gift. Nor do we need the testimony of the two remarkable and often-cited passages, from Suetonius and from Tacitus,

to prove that at this time of expectation, as well as somewhat later, the eyes of men were especially directed toward Judæa, and toward Jerusalem, unconsciously felt, as it was, to be the spiritual metropolis, not of Judæa only, but of the East and of the world.*

And then, if the times were thus times of a solemn and breathless expectation, these men who came were men in whom, more than in most, as their coming and their inquiries show, the longing of the time had concentrated itself; they were eminently "men of desires."†

* Only some feeling of the kind would explain Pliny's words (H. N., l. v, c. 14): Hierosolyma, *longe clarissima* urbium Orientis, non Judææ modo; for in outward splendour it must have fallen behind many.

† The striking phrase, "man of desires," belongs to the Vulgate translation of Daniel, and is given by the angel to the prophet himself (vir desideriorum es: Dan. ix, 23). The manner in which the Magi were, or were held to be, these "men of desires," ever on the watch for tokens and glimpses of a divine character and presence in men, comes remarkably out in the incident mentioned by Seneca, of some that happened to be at Athens at the time of Plato's decease, and who were so impressed with his having fulfilled to a day his 81st year—i. e., 9×9, the most perfect number of all—that they offered sacrifices to him, as to one more than man (Ep. 58): Ideo Magi, qui forte Athenis erant, immolaverunt defuncto, amplioris fuisse sortis quam humanæ rati, quia consummásset

And if they were such, and Christ the true magnet of hearts, drawing them to Himself by an invisible but mighty potency, how little strange, how natural rather and easy, that, by guidances which we do not know, by little indications which, insufficient for most, would yet have been sufficient for them, by secret illuminations of their minds, which made that tongue of the heavens to speak a language which they could understand, they should have found their way to Jerusalem first, and then to the very place where the young Child, the fulfiller of the world's hopes, was laid.* Instead, then, of making difficulties as to how they connected the Star and the King of the Jews, how they found their way so far with nothing but that Star to beckon them on, it

perfectissimum numerum, quem novem novies multiplicata componunt.

* Augustine very beautifully (Serm. 203): Illi Magi primi ex gentibus Christum Dominum cognoverunt, et nondum ejus sermone commoti, stellam sibi apparentem, et pro infante Verbo visibiliter loquentem, velut linguam cœli, secuti sunt. Leo the Great (Serm. 30, c. 1): Dedit ergo aspicientibus intellectum, qui præstitit signum; et quod fecit intelligi, fecit inquiri, et se inveniendum obtulit requisitus. Cf. Serm. 32, c. 2.

will be more profitable for us to see in their finding of Christ, and in the Jews' failing to find Him,—while yet these last had so many helps, and they so few,—proofs and examples of a truth to which every day a witness is being borne; namely, how little is sufficient to draw disposed and believing hearts to Christ, how much is insufficient to draw them that are otherwise. Prophets speak and accomplish nothing in these: the beckoning of a silent star is effectual with those.*

§ 4.—*The Trouble of Herod.*

But this inquiry of the wise men, this word of theirs about a "*King of the Jews*," was to some a word of fear. The tidings of their coming ran like an electric shock through the palace of the usurping Idumæan. Herod "*was troubled.*" When we remember the recent agitations at Jerusalem through the refusal of the Pharisees, to the number of six thousand,

* Maximus (Hom. 5, de Epiph.): Apud Judæos propheta loquitur, nec auditur; apud gentes stella silet et suadet.

to take the oath of allegiance to him,* with their prophecy of the divinely-intended transfer of the kingdom from him and his race to a favourite of their own, we can easily understand how much less a thing would have been sufficient to terrify him than this announcement of the Star and of the King;† as these will also help to explain the bloody precautions which presently he took. "*He was troubled,*" for "the wicked fear where no fear is," even as in one sense there was none even for him: for this King that was born was candidate for quite another crown than any which Herod would have cared to wear. (Matt. xxvii, 29.) But though not exactly in the shape that he imagined, in another sense there was most truly fear: the King of righteousness was born, and the whole kingdom of unrighteousness felt itself already tottering to its base.‡

* Josephus, Ant., 17, 2, 4.

† *Mutantem regna* cometen.

‡ Augustine exclaims on this trouble of Herod, and with manifest allusion to the fox-like character which the Saviour attributes to Herod's son, (Luke xiii, 32,) a character coming out abundantly in Herod's own devices for bringing the young Child into his power (Serm. 375): Natus est cœli Leo, et turbata est terrena vulpecula:

And thus it came to pass that not Herod only "*was troubled*," but "*all Jerusalem with him*."* To say, as some have done, that he was troubled with fear, and Jerusalem with joy, is very unnatural. Jerusalem shared in his trouble and fear—not, indeed the Jerusalem

and again, with one of his well-loved antitheses (Serm. 206): Quid erit tribunal Judicantis, quando superbos reges cunæ terrebant Infantis?

* Since Ἱεροσόλυμα is always a neuter plural in the New Testament, (τὰ Ἱεροσ.) and never a fem. sing., (for Matt. iii, 5 cannot be justly brought as an exception,) the πᾶσα here must be a constructio ad sensum, referring to a πόλις latent in the city's appellation. In Josephus, Strabo, and all other profane writers, is it equally a neuter plural; for the one decisive exception, *Hierosolymam* in Tacitus, (Hist., 5, 2,) which is as contrary to his own otherwise uniform use as to that of others, is rejected from the text by both his latest editors, Orelli and Ritter. On the word itself, and its relation to the more Hebrew Ἱερουσαλήμ, the former observes: Hâc formâ ad vocem ἱερός a Græcis detortâ, ut significaret "urbs sacra vel templum Solymorum," [Tac. Hist. 5, 2,] primus usus esse videtur Hecatæus Abderita apud Joseph. Con. Ap. 1, 22: reperitur etiam in libro Tobiæ et secundo Maccabæorum: apud ceteros LXX. est Ἱερουσαλήμ. It is characteristic of the more Greek colouring of St. John's Gospel, and the more Hebrew of his Apocalypse, *that* written more *ἐν νοι, this ἐν πνευματι*, that in the Gospel he should use always the Greek form, in the Apocalypse always the Hebrew. (See Bengel's Gnomon, in Apoc. 21, 2.)

of Simeon and of Anna, and of the little company that watched and waited for the consolation of Israel, (Luke ii, 25–38;) they lifted up their heads; but the Jerusalem of the Scribes and Pharisees, the misusers of spiritual, as Herod of worldly, powers. True it is that these may presently have forgotten their fears, and persuaded themselves that it was but a false alarm after all; yet for a moment they, too, were troubled: for little as they had in common with Herod, yet they had this in common—namely, an equal enmity to the truth, an equal interest in the upholding of that kingdom of unrighteousness and wrong, which they all felt must go to the ground so soon as the kingdom of this King of truth was set up. (Isa. xxxii, 1–8; Psa. lxxii.)

§ 5.—*Micah's Prophecy.*

THE question which Herod lays before the Sanhedrim, "*Where Christ should be born,*" shows plainly that, strange as probably he was to the Scriptures of the prophets, he yet understood this much, that "*Christ*" and "*King*

of the Jews" were equivalent and convertible terms. "*And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*" On comparing this prophecy, as cited here, with the original text of Micah, there appears at first sight more than one remarkable discrepancy between the two. In the prophecy as first delivered, Bethlehem is addressed as "little among the thousands of Judah;" in Matthew, as "*not the least among the princes of Juda:*" nor is Jerome's solution—that we have here an intentional inaccuracy on the part of St. Matthew, although not his own, but that of the Scribes and Pharisees, which he yet retains, thus silently taxing them with their negligent handling of Scripture—worthy of any acceptation. The explanation must be sought elsewhere.

On the substitution of "*princes*" for "thousands," there will be something presently to say; but passing that by for the present, there certainly at first seems more than a variation,

even a contradiction, between the "little" of the prophet, and the "*not the least*" of the Evangelist. But, in truth, the latter does but blend into a single phrase two statements which the former had made. Small and not small, is what the prophet, too, would say; seeming little, and yet being great. If we take in his whole statement in this second verse, it will be seen that he is contrasting the outward insignificance of Bethlehem with the mighty events which should there occur, and which should give it a place in the world's history, and in the Church's affections, forever. "Thou art small, and yet not small; for this thy smallness shall not hinder, but that He shall go forth from thee, whose goings forth have been also from of old, from everlasting." The Evangelist, overleaping the steps of the process by which the prophet had reached his result, grasps at, and makes that final result his own—namely, that this little should yet not be little; since from it, small as it appeared, there should yet go forth a Prince,*

* There is so evident an intention on the part of St. Matthew to allude in the ἡγούμενος to the ἡγεμόνες who

no mere head of a family or a tribe, but He that should *feed* (for I see not why we should drop this word) the whole Israel of God.

But we have also to account for a substitution of "*princes*" in St. Matthew, for the "thousands" of Micah. This will best be done by considering, first, what the "thousands" were. It may, I think, certainly be shown that they were that intermediate division between the tribe and the household; which goes more commonly in the his-

have just gone before, the word is so plainly chosen for the sake of its like sound and like derivation, (it was ἄρχων in the Septuagint,) that it would have been better, I think, if our translators had again used "Prince" instead of "*Governor*." Plainly, if they could have found two slightly differing words of the same stem, this would have been best of all. "Prince" is further preferable to "*Governor*," inasmuch as *that* expresses *leadership*, (in the Vulgate, dux; Tindal, Cranmer, the Geneva, captain,) and so gives back the thought of the original, in a way that *this* does not. This is the only place in the New Testament where ἡγούμενος is used of our Lord. It is once beside used in the same absolute sense—of Joseph, a ruler in Egypt, (Acts vii, 10,) and the church rulers are ἡγούμενοι, Heb. xiii, ter. In the later Greek of Herodian, Polybius, Diodorus Siculus, it is common enough for governors of provinces, captains in war; so also in the Septuagint, being especially frequent in the son of Sirach, ix, 17; x, 2.

toric books of the Old Testament by the name of the "family." We observe that the twelve tribes of which the Jewish nation consisted, were made up each of a certain number of "families," these "families" being again composed of a certain number of "households." The two passages which are most distinct upon this matter, and which throw most light on it, are Josh. vii, 14–18, and 1 Sam. x, 19–21.* In the last of these passages the "families" of verse 21 are plainly the "thousands" of verse 19; and the words are interchangeably used. The "thousand," there is every reason to believe, originally consisted, like the German and Anglo-Saxon "hundred," of a certain number of the "households;" and, as the word indicates, of a thousand households or heads of families, more or fewer, grouped together; doubtless, according to considerations more or less

* To avoid confusion, it may just be needful to observe, that the "family" in these and similar passages does not in the least correspond to the Latin *familia*, which would rather represent the "household," but much more nearly to the Roman *gens*, or to one of the Athenian δῆμοι.

distinct of kindred and of common descent; the territorial divisions (not of the tribes, but of these subdivisions within the tribes) being secondary to, and resting on, the personal. But, in the nature of things, this secondary would come by degrees to be the primary; for as it would be manifestly impossible perpetually to readjust the territorial divisions, so that each of them should always contain the same number of households as at the first, these would be left as they were, while the number of households they contained might become many fewer or many more than the name implied; and thus there could be "little" thousands, as Bethlehem, or great ones. Some would rise, others fall, in importance. Thus Gideon, when he would fain put back the angel's summons that he should go and deliver Israel, speaks of his "family," (χιλίας, LXX.,) which he entirely distinguishes from his "father's house," as "poor in Manasseh." Judges vi, 15. Exactly in the same way the Anglo-Saxon "hundreds" gradually came to embrace, some fewer, some a far greater number of households, than the

name implied; and the name itself, like the smaller one of the tithing, ended with possessing, as it does now, a merely local significance. We have the "thousand" exactly used in the sense of a certain district. (1 Sam. xxiii, 23.) But as there were phylarchs, or heads of tribes, so there were chiliarchs, or heads of thousands. (Exod. xviii, 25.) These would represent their "thousands;" and St. Matthew here beholds the "thousands" of which Micah spoke, as thus represented or gathered up in these "*princes*." The prince whose thousand was least in importance would be himself *least*, for all his importance, as prince, would be derived from it.

The "thousand," then, of which Bethlehem was the chief town, and that which gave to the entire thousand its name, was "little among the thousands of Judah." All history confirms the statement. Bethlehem was in early times a place of so small account that it is omitted in the long catalogue of the cities of Judah. (Joshua xv, 21–62.*)

* In the Septuagint, indeed, (*cod. Alexand.*) it is inserted after v. 60, with some other omitted places.

Even as "the city of David," (Luke ii, 11; 1 Sam. xvi, 1,) the birthplace of the best and greatest of Israel's kings, it yet acquired no political importance. Rehoboam, indeed, fortified it, and made it one of his cities of defence, after the division of the kingdoms. (2 Chron. ii, 6.) Yet in Micah's time it was, as we see, of no account; and at John vii, 42, it is a *κώμη*, and not a *πόλις*, with which title, however, Josephus sometimes honours it, though elsewhere he calls it a *χωρίον*.* It is often called Bethlehem-Judah, as at Judges xvii, 7, 8; 1 Sam. xvii, 12, and in St. Matthew's citation of Micah, to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulon. (Joshua xxix, 15.) The word stands here as a substitute for the Ephratah of Micah v, 2, which served the same purpose of designating more closely the Bethlehem to which the prophecy referred and the promise was made, (Gen. xxxv, 19; 1 Sam. xvii, 12,) but which name had now probably become obsolete. There was, then, an evident motive for the substitution of "*Juda*" for Ephratah, bring-

* Ant., l. 5, c. 2, § 8.

ing out, as that does more distinctly, and even to those unacquainted with the antiquities of the land, that in this birth another prophecy and another just expectation of those that waited for the Messiah was fulfilled, namely, that he should be born of the tribe of Judah, (Gen. xlix, 10,) a circumstance on which we find the sacred writers afterwards laying stress. (Heb. vii, 14; Rev. v, 5.)

And now, when this prophecy found its accomplishment at length, Bethlehem indeed became that which its name had promised from the first, "the house of bread;"* for He who had been always the bread of angels, and who, in his incarnation, became also the bread of men, found his earliest earthly habitation there. Now was Ephratah truly the "fruit-bearing field," for He that was the Branch of righteousness, (Jer. xxxiii, 15,) the Man whose name was The Branch, (Zech. vi, 12,) had sprung up within its borders. Hitherto these names had but indicated the

* בֵּית לֶחֶם = domus panis. Tirinus: Ita coctus est panis angelorum, ut etiam hominum usibus fieret accommodus.

fulness of earthly blessing, the rich abundance of the fruits of the field which that region yielded; but now their deeper meaning comes out. All that this double appellation (the *nomen et omen*) had silently prophesied so long, was realized at length. We have too many of these significant names, Golgotha, and Cedron, and Gethsemane, and others, to have the right to suppose them merely accidental.

From this answer of the Sanhedrim, which at once designates Bethlehem as the place where Christ should be born, it is plain that at that time the Jews had no question concerning the application of the prophecy of Micah to the Messiah; as neither did they doubt that its purpose was to point out the place of his birth. It would have been indeed strange, when everything else was so definite,—the tribe from which he should spring, (Gen. xlix, 10;) and not the tribe only, but the family, (2 Sam. xxiii, 5;) the time of his appearing, (Dan. ix, 26;) the region which should first rejoice in the light of his presence, (Isa. ix, 1, 2; cf. Matt. iv,

13;) and so much besides,—that there should have been here a gap, and no intimation given of the *place* of his birth. But that Christ should be born at Bethlehem was among the Jews at this time, (John vii, 42,) and long after, an undoubted article of faith. As yet they had no motive to do violence to the plain meaning and intention of their own Scriptures which so affirmed. Subsequently it was otherwise. The fulfilment of the prophecy in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and its non-fulfilment in any other who laid claim to be the Messiah, was so plain, that they were tempted to betake themselves to various shifts for evading the force of the argument, which the Christians derived from the meeting of this and all other of the fore-announced signs and tokens of the Messiah and his person whom they recognised as such, with their absence from every one beside. It is true that they could not all at once shift their ground, and take up a new position; that the earlier Rabbis were obliged to content themselves with some such evasion as that Messiah had indeed been born at Beth-

lehem, but on account of the sins of Israel had been again withdrawn from the sight of men. Yet that their eyes still turned in expectation toward this city, as that from which the governor of Israel should come forth, is plain from the edict of Adrian, published after the insurrection of Barchochab, which forbade any Jew to reside at Jerusalem *or Bethlehem.*[*]

The later Jewish Rabbis had another way of dealing with this prophecy. Neither did they deny that the words of Micah had reference to Messiah, and the place of his birth; (for Chrysostom's assertion, that some Jews explained these words as having been fulfilled in Zerubbabel, seems probably a mistake of his—a Christian interpreter, Theodore of Mopsuestia, the anticipator in so much of the modern rationalism, had the honour of first proposing this interpretation;) but they affirmed that it referred only *mediately* to Messiah's birth-place, and had its fulfilment,

[*] To this edict Tertullian alludes in his argument with the Jew, Adv. Jud., c. 13; and see also Schoettgen's Hor. Heb., v. 2, pp. 527–531.

inasmuch as David, the progenitor of Christ, was born at Bethlehem.* Christ, they said, was born there, when David was. But, indeed, this helpless embarrassment of the Jews in regard of this and each other of the prophecies relating to the Messiah—this inability of theirs to make anything of them, justifies abundantly the image which has likened Old-Testament prophecy and New-Testament fulfilment to the lower and upper millstones, fitting into one another, and which between them grind the bread-corn. But what so useless as one of these stones apart from the other? The Jews, in their refusal to accept the New-Testament fulfilment, are as those who should possess only one of these millstones, that is, the lower; but who, having cast aside the other, can make no use of the one which they retain. They are utterly unable to prepare by its aid food for their souls, or to draw wholesome nutriment from that word of the promise which is theirs

* Huet (Dem. Evang., p. 393) remarks well on this subterfuge of theirs: Id si accipimus, jam ergo multiplex nobis patria erit, totque natales terras numerabimus, quot loci majoribus nostris ortum dederunt.

equally as ours. Or they might be likened, as indeed they have been, to the foremost of the twain that bare between them, two upon a staff, the one cluster of grapes from the promised land. They bear it, indeed, but do not see it, for they have their back turned to it, and not, as the Christians who follow after, the face. (Num. xiii, 23.)

It has been often, too, remarked, what a prophetic sign and symbol of the function of the Jews in all after ages we have here, in these foremost men of the nation, who show to Gentile seekers the way which will lead them to Christ, while they do not care to tread it themselves: for we hear of none of the chief priests and scribes joining themselves to this company to offer with them the homage, which, due from all men to Israel's King, was yet eminently due from those of his own people; but, on the contrary, they suffer them to depart alone. What a prophecy, it has well been observed, is here of what the Jewish nation ever since have been! —the near, and yet prevented and outrun by those that were far off; bearers of a record

and a testimony, from which not they, but others, live; continual witnesses against themselves: guiding inquirers to Christ, and yet never finding the way to him themselves; faithful guardians of the letter of those Scriptures, which are evermore their own condemnation; pointing others to the fountain of life, and all the while themselves perishing with thirst in the wilderness.*

§ 6.—*The Joy of the Wise Men.*

But now, armed with this knowledge, the evil king "*privily called the wise men*," not as though by this privy summons he would keep secret the fact of their coming, for that was already notorious, (verse 2,) but probably desirous to conceal the importance which he attached to it, and to the tidings which they

* Augustine (Serm. 199): Nunc vero aliis demonstrato vitæ fonte, ipsi sunt mortui siccitate. Facti sunt eis tanquam lapides ad milliaria; viatoribus ambulantibus aliquid ostenderunt, sed ipsi stolidi atque immobiles permanserunt. And again: Illi portant codices, nos de codicibus vivimus. And Aquinas: Similes facti sunt fabris arcæ Noë; qui aliis ubi evaderent, præstiterunt, et ipsi diluvio perierunt.

brought. Having "*inquired of them diligently*,"—not when this King was born, for that lay not with any certainty within the sphere of their knowledge, but "*what time the star appeared,—he sent them to Bethlehem:*" with that word which sheltered the wickedest purpose under the disguise of the holiest, "*Go, and search diligently for the young Child, and when ye have found Him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship Him also.*"

They do not seem to have made Herod any promise of return, which, of course, even if they had, would not have bound them, so soon as they were warned with what purpose it had been drawn from them. All that we are told is, that "*when they had heard the king, they departed.*" But not altogether unaccompanied; for "*lo! the star which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over*"—not the house, for nothing of the kind is said, but—"*where the young Child was.*"*

* There are those who make a great difficulty and outcry about this statement of the star standing over the place where the young Child was. They begin to calculate at

That we have here optical, and not astronomical notices, I think is plain; that this star also served them now for quite another, and a far higher purpose, than that of merely showing to them their way, precious witness as it was to them still, that they were on the right way. Indeed, we shall miss the right point of view if we contemplate the star through any part of their journey so much in the light of a topographical as of a religious signal and guide.

how great a distance even the nearest stars are from the earth, and how impossible it is that a star should designate some particular locality on earth; and hence they conclude that this, as an evidently apocryphal element in the narration, may well throw suspicion over the whole. Yet the same persons will read in Josephus, among the portents which preceded the destruction of Jerusalem, of the comet which *stood over* the city, (B. J., l. 6, c. 5, § 3, ἔστη ὑπὲρ τὴν πόλιν—the same word as here,) and make no difficulties about it. But this denying to Holy Scripture the liberty which is freely accorded to every other book, of speaking phenomenally when it pleases, is a very ordinary engine of assault upon it. When it serves their turn, the adversaries are suddenly taken with a rigour of affected accuracy, which almost no statement is literal enough to satisfy. It was so also of old, as we see from Augustine's indignant replies, in more places than one, to cavillers of the same order. (Con. Faust., l. 33, c. 7, 8.)

But how exactly shall we understand this ninth verse in connexion with that which follows? "*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*"* Had they lost sight of the star for a season,—for the season, that is, of their stay in the city, so that they greatly rejoiced when they recognised it anew?† Thus the passage has been understood by many: and of these some have found a mystical significance in this its disappearance, and have said, When they chose to walk in the light of men, they lost the light of heaven.‡ Others have yet further extended the period during which the star had been hidden from them: have supposed

* Ἐχάρησαν χαράν, according to the well-known Hebraism, which, indeed, finds its analogies in almost every tongue. Juvencus reproduces it in his versified narrative of the Lord's life:

Gaudia magna magi *gaudent*, sidusque salutant.

Compare 1 Kings i, 40; Jer. xxxviii, 3—LXX. (ἀγάπησιν αἰώνιον ἠγάπησά σε); 1 Tim. i, 18; Luke ii, 9 (ἐφοβήθησαν φόβον,) and Jonah iv, 6, where these very words of the text occur.

† Thus Euthymius: Ὡς εὑρόντες τὸν ἀψευδέστατον ὁδηγόν.

‡ So Bernard: Ut qui humanum quærebant consilium, divinum amitterent ducem.

that they had but seen it at their first setting forth, in its rising; that it then had but pointed them the way, and this done, disappeared, till now they beheld it anew at the end of their journey, as once they had beheld it at the beginning. Or are we merely to understand, as some suggest, that the day had been consumed in the great city, in their inquiries there after Him whom they were seeking, in their interview with Herod, and that now, at evening, as those who would fain make their journey by night, they set forth once more, and delightedly beheld the heavenly guide, that had guided them so far, still marshalling their path,—with the more delight since, perhaps, they might have concluded, that having led them so far, and having put them in relation with those who could give them those certain notices which now they had, they should not see it any more?

I am inclined to think that neither of these explanations exactly represents the meaning of the evangelist, which Maldonatus has more successfully caught. He bids us to

notice that these words, "*When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy,*" immediately follow his statement that "*it came and stood over where the young Child was,*" which they must needs in a natural order have preceded, if either of the meanings above suggested had been the right one. But as they now stand, they express the joy of those eastern seers, not at the mere seeing of the star, which they had often seen before, but at seeing it stand over where the young Child was, having at length fulfilled its mission, and having brought them there where they would be. It is the joy of men that have the haven in sight; that are just about to grasp the good expected so long.*

* Maldonatus: Nec enim significat, ut ego quidem arbitror, Evangelista Magos aspectu stellæ, quæ paulo ante evanuisse videbatur, lætos fuisse; sed eos gavisos fuisse videntes stellam, (sicut proximè dixerat,) stantem supra ubi erat puer. Lætantur enim non quod stellam viderint, quam sæpe jam viderant; sed quod Christum quem quærebant invenerant.

§ 7.—*The Wise Men Worshipping.*

St. Matthew, it will be observed, speaks of the Magi as having come "*into the house.*" Was this the same place where the Child Jesus had been born? Did they find the Lord of Glory still in that stable, or cave, or whatever place it might have been, where the manger had served for his earliest resting-place on earth, (Luke ii, 7,) and where the shepherds had found Him laid. It may have been so; it is most commonly taken for granted that it was so, in homiletic allusions, as in Christian art; and certainly there is nothing in that word "*the house*" to compel us to any other conclusion: since it needed not for St. Matthew, who wrote with so different an object from St. Luke, from a theocratic, as St. Luke from an ethical, point of view, to make prominent, as he has done, the stable or the inn. In St. Luke's Gospel, which was, more than any other, a gospel for the poor, for those whom the proud and prosperous world had slighted and despised, this consolation—this

gleam of glory lighting up henceforth each lowly shed, each humblest habitation of the servants of God, who, so lodged, did but share a common lot with their Lord—could not well have been omitted. But St. Matthew had quite another purpose in view: his was to record the early dignities of the royal Child, who even in his cradle received the ambassadors of the nations, who yet "an infant of days" was honoured, as with the love and homage of the good, so also with the deadly hatred and enmity of the wicked. Yet, granting that the words, "*the house*," do not *oblige* us to suppose any other place, still how very probably it may have been some other! Even assuming this visit to have found place so early as the twelfth day after the Nativity, how easily might Joseph and the Blessed Virgin, in reverence for their awful charge, have by that day shifted their habitation for some lowly, yet not so altogether misbeseeming a place.

But we may leave this for a somewhat more important consideration. "*When they were come into the house, they saw the young Child*

with Mary his mother"—Joseph is kept purposely in the background—"*and fell down and worshipped Him.*" It is, indeed, an interesting question, and dogmatically not unimportant, how much is implied in this "*worship*," which the Evangelist tells us the wise men addressed to the infant Saviour? There are those who see in it no more than civil homage, as to an earthly king: who again may be divided into two classes; such as conceive that to Him no greater honour competed, and therefore no greater would have been paid by these divinely enlightened sages, Photinian and other heretics; and such as, like Erasmus, not at all denying that such higher honours were rightly his due, yet do not find the mention or ascription of them here. I cannot doubt that these are as much in error as those, although their error springs not from any such deadly root. It is quite true that the word which St. Matthew uses began with a merely civil, and only by degrees acquired a religious, significance;* that at first it meant

* Προσκυνεῖν, as in Latin, adorare. (See Döderlein's Synonyme, v, 2, p. 188.)

no more than the profoundly respectful salutation of the inferior to his superior;* that even in the Septuagint, as at Gen. xxiii, 7, 12; xxvii, 29; and perhaps xlvii, 31, it is sometimes used in the lower sense in which the word to *worship* is used in our Marriage Service, to acknowledge by an outward gesture or an inner tribute of respect the *worthship* or dignity of another; as it was in Wiclif's Bible, "*worship* thy father and thy mother;" and even in our present version, "Then shalt thou have *worship* in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee." (Luke xiv, 10.)

Yet in classical Greek the word had come very generally to be used in its religious sense; it is so remarkably often in Sophocles; nor, among all the other passages where the word occurs in the New Testament, can there be adduced a single one in which it has other than a religious significance, in which it does not, at the least, imply the recognition of a Divine character and presence in him to whom

* Herodotus, 1, 134, to which Passow refers, does not bear out his assertion that it is ever used as to salute merely with the hand on the mouth—ἀσπάζεσθαι.

this homage is paid; and oftentimes much more than this, even the adoration due only to the God of gods, and Lord of lords. There are two passages very decisive of the sense in which the sacred writers of the New Testament used the word, and of the light in which they regarded the homage which was expressed by it. The first is Acts x, 25, 26, where Peter refuses to accept this worship from Cornelius: for "I myself also am a man." The second is Rev. xxii, 8, 9, where in like manner the angel forbids the offering of the worship to himself: "See thou do it not; for I am thy fellow-servant: . . . worship God." The only passage which *seems* to contradict this universal rule of the word's use is Matt. xviii, 26, where the servant is said to have fallen down and "worshipped" his lord. But if we assume, as we have a perfect right to do, that the scene of this parable is the East—for where else should we find defaulters in ten thousand talents?—and remember that this lord whom the servant "worshipped" was also his king, this case will not be found an exceptional instance; for the reverence paid to the eastern

monarch, and to the king of Persia in particular, which technically bore this name of adoration or worship, did entirely ground itself on the recognition of him as the representative and incarnation of Ormuzd, and was purely an act of religious homage.* Therefore, indeed, the introduction of this ceremony found such resistance both from the Greek† and the Jew, (Esth. iii, 2,) although the motives of the resistance were very different—the Greek refusing compliance as dishonouring to himself, the Jew as dishonouring to his God.‡

But even if the words admitted any plausible doubt on this matter, which they do not,

* Two passages, for many, may be quoted. Curtius says (viii, 5) : Persas reges suos inter Deos colere ; and the Persian in Plutarch (Themistocles, c. 27) : Ἡμῖν νόμος ἐστι τιμᾶν βασιλέα καὶ προσκυνεῖν εἰκόνα Θεοῦ τοῦ τὰ πάντα σώζοντος.

† Herodotus, vii, 136.

‡ We have further evidence, not of course such as we could rest much on by itself, but of weight as joined with all else, that the Evangelist intended to relate an act of *religious* worship—in other words, with which he expresses the homage done by these magi to the infant Lord. Without urging too much the προσήνεγκαν and the δῶρα, yet it is worthy of note how exclusively in the sense of a religious offering the words προσφέρειν and προσφορά are used in the New Testament : thus eighteen

in the very circumstance of these wise men's coming there lay a recognition, upon their part, of something more than mortal in Him who was the object of their quest. He must have been one in their eyes who, though "*King of the Jews*,"—or who rather, *because* "*King of the Jews*,"—was also King of another and far higher kingdom. What attraction would "*a King of the Jews*," who was only such, and in nothing differed from other kings, have had in their eyes, that he should have drawn them from their distant homes? How, moreover, could they have ventured, at the centre of Herod's kingdom and power, to announce that they were come to do homage even there to another king than himself? or how could he, without so manifest an absurdity, such a contradiction as must at once have betrayed him, have proposed to unite in that homage, unless it had been clearly understood, on their part as on his, that this King was ruler of a king-

or nineteen times in the Epistle to the Hebrews alone; and δῶρον only once signifies the gift which man makes to man, (Rev. xi, 10,) but sixteen, or seventeen times, including the present, the gift or offering which man makes to God.

dom spiritual and Divine, which need not therefore have been assumed in the least to interfere or clash with his, however to his fears it actually seemed as if it would? We are not of course to suppose that they, any more than others who, at a later period of our Lord's life, are said to have worshipped Him, (Matt. viii, 2; xx, 20; Mark v, 6; John ix, 38, &c.,) possessed already the full-formed faith of the after Church, concerning the person of her Lord —a faith into the full consciousness of which, and all that it involved, the Church herself only came by degrees. To suppose this would be to suppose that they ran before apostles themselves in their knowledge of Christ. For even on them the knowledge of all which in their Lord was given them only dawns by little and little, as from glory to glory. But these worshippers possessed this faith in its germs, and such that it only waited the occasions of its further development; which being so, this *Epiphany* was also what the Church has so often loved to call it—a *Theophany* as well.

§ 8.—*The Gifts.*

"*And when they had opened their treasures,*"—by which "*treasures*" we must understand, not the precious things themselves which they had brought, but the chests, caskets, vessels, (which is the word of the Arabic version,) or other receptacles which contained them,*—"*they presented unto Him gifts,*"†—

* Θησαυρός = אוֹצָר, Deut. xxviii, 12, the receptacle for treasure, (Josephus, Ant., ix, 8, 2,) whether portable as here, = κιβωτός, 2 Kings xii, 9, (LXX.); or the treasure-chamber, as often elsewhere: Matt. xii, 35; xiii, 52; Joshua vi, 19, (LXX.)

† There was another passage of prophecy besides the more obvious ones, Psa. lxxii, 10; Isa. lx, 6, alluded to already, which was very commonly, in the early Church, held to have found its fulfilment in these gifts—namely, Isa. viii, 4. Such an application of the passage was favoured by the earlier Latin translation, which, as we gather from Tertullian (Adv. Jud., c. 9; cf. Adv. Marcion., l. 3, c. 13), was: *Accipiet* virtutem Damasci et spolia Samariæ; and not as in the Vulgate: Auferetur fortitudo Damasci et spolia Samariæ. How the application was exactly made may be best understood by a quotation from Augustine, (Serm. 202, c. 2,) who, however, is plainly following therein the footsteps of Tertullian. Alluding to these gifts, he says: Tunc enim puer prius quam sciret vocare patrem et matrem, sicut de illo fuerat prophetatum, accepit virtutem Damasci et spolia

after the custom of the East, which will not allow any person to come empty-handed into the presence of the great, but requires that the inward devotedness should embody itself in an outward gift. Thus we have continual mention of such gifts, as made to kings and other great persons on earth, and to the King of kings in heaven. (1 Sam. x, 27; 1 Kings x, 2; Gen. xxxii, 13; xliii, 11, 25; 1 Sam. ix, 7; xxv, 18, 27; Job xiii, 11.) That these gifts on this occasion presented were themselves mystical;* that they who offered

Samariæ: id est, antequam per humanam carnem humana verba proferret, accepit virtutem Damasci, illud scil. unde Damascus præsumebat. In divitiis quippe civitas illa secundum sæculum florens aliquando præsumserat. In divitiis autem principatus auro defertur, quod Christo magi suppliciter obtulerunt. Spolia vero Samariæ iidem ipsi erant, qui eam incolebant. Samaria namque pro idololatriâ posita. . . . Debellaturus scil. Christus gladio spiritali per universum orbem regnum diaboli, hæc prima puer spolia idololatriæ dominatione detraxit, ut ad se adorandum magos conversos a peste illius superstitionis averteret; et in hâc terrâ nondum loquens per linguam, loqueretur de cælo per stellam; ut et quis esset, et quò, et propter quos venisset, non voce carnis, sed virtute Verbi, quod caro factum est, demonstraret.

* Mystica munera, Juvencus calls them.

them meant more, or, at any rate, that more was meant by the Spirit which prompted them to these, than merely that they would present to this Child the costliest things which they had; that in these, no less than in the worship which went with them, there was a confession of faith,[*] explicit or implicit; —this the Church has evermore felt; and the special symbolic significance which has been attributed severally to the three gifts is probably familiar to all. The frankincense, the choicest of all odours, was offered to the Son of God, who as such was himself also God, and to whom therefore the sweet odours of prayer and all other sacrifices were rightly due: the myrrh to the son of Mary, who, as man, was subject to mortality, while, at the same time, he should be free from corruption; the myrrh, therefore, used in burial, and yet preserving from decay, containing a latent prophecy, not of his death and burial only, as it is sometimes explained, but the

[*] Leo the Great: Quod cordibus credunt, muneribus protestantur. Fulgentius: Attende quid obtulerint, et cognosce quid crediderint.

pledge also of his resurrection:* and the gold to the Son of David, the King of Israel, to whom all other kings and people should yield tribute of the most precious things which they had.†

But these gifts—royal, Divine, and human—may claim to be considered somewhat more in detail. There is a *sacred* character belonging to all three, and not the least to the gold. Even now in the East there are nations,—the Burmese, for instance,—among whom it is not permitted to coin gold into money, or otherwise to employ it in common

* So in the ancient hymn:—

Myrrha, caro verbo nupta,
Per quod manet incorrupta
Caro carens carie.

† The earliest writer, I believe, who makes this application, at least of those who have come down to us, is Irenæus (Con. Hær., l. 3, c. 9, § 2): Matthæus magos ait per ea quæ obtulerunt munera ostendisse, quis erat qui adorabatur. Myrrham quidem, quod ipse erat, qui pro mortali humano genere moreretur et sepeliretur; aurum vero quoniam Rex, cujus regni finis non est; thus vero, quoniam Deus, qui et notus in Judæâ factus est, [Psa. lxxv, 2,] et manifestus eis, qui non quærebant eum. Cf. Origen, Con. Cels., l. 1, c. 60; and generally for passages from the Greek fathers, Suicer, Thes., v. λίβανος.

and profane uses; this metal being reserved exclusively for Divine, or, which is there the same thing, royal uses,* and being with them a usual offering to their gods, (cf. Psalm lxxvii, 15: "To Him shall be given of the gold of Arabia.") On this, its sacred character, rests the fact that in the holy of holies, as the image of heaven, all is either of massive gold, or thickly overlaid with gold. (Exod. xxxviii; cf. 1 Kings vi.) For heaven is the palace of light—of light, it needs not to say, ethically contemplated; and in the bright shining of gold there is that which better symbolizes light than anything besides. And thus, too, the New Jerusalem, "having the glory of God," the brightness of God's presence, is a city of pure gold. (Rev. xxi, 11, 18, 33.) Alike in the actual tabernacle and in the ideal city, something more than the costliness of the gold is to be taken into account, to explain its selection as the material of which the one and other is composed; and so is it here. This gift is not less significant of the higher character of

* Ritter, Erdkunde von Asien, 4, 1, 244.

Him to whom it is offered than the two with which it is joined.*

The frankincense,† among all the odours of antiquity the highest prized and the costliest, was a gum exuding, with slight solicitation, from a plant about which there is nearly as much uncertainty now, as Pliny confesses that in his time there was.‡ The Jews obtained it from Arabia Felix, (Jer. vi. 20,) and in all antiquity it was considered to

* The suggestion which has been sometimes made, that this gold may have served, and by the providence of God was intended, in the deep poverty of the holy family, to serve as a viaticum on occasion of the hurried flight into Egypt, which was so near—this suggestion is not altogether to be rejected, since we know that at a later period the Lord condescended to accept and use the offerings of his servants. (Luke viii. 3.)

† Λίβανος only occurs here and Rev. xviii. 13, in the New Testament. It is strictly the tree which yields the frankincense, and λιβανωτος, (which is used with a certain impropriety for the censer or thuribulum, Rev. viii. 3, 5,) the frankincense itself. But Aristotle does not observe the distinction, and in Hellenistic Greek, in the Septuagint, for instance, it is entirely neglected. Thus, often as the frankincense is there named, λιβανωτος is found only once, (1 Chron. ix. 29,) but λιβανος continually.

‡ H. N., l. 12, c. 31.

be native there, and there only.[3] Yet modern naturalists are now generally agreed that the genuine frankincense is a product of India, and was only believed to be of Arabia, because it could not be traced farther than to the Arabian merchants, through whose hands the inhabitants of Western Asia and Europe obtained it. How frequent its use in the Levitical offerings, need not be observed; so frequent and so predominant, that although we cannot affirm it to have been absolutely restricted to the service of God, yet we justly feel that there was an ascription of Divine honours to Him unto whom this offering was made.

In the myrrh there is no such explicit recognition of a Divine character in Him to whom it is presented, as in the two preceding gifts; nor was it to be expected that there should, since in this lay rather the confession of his mortality. It appears, indeed, as one of the four ingredients of the holy anointing oil, (Exod. xxx. 23,) but this is the only occa-

[3] Olor Arabicus, as it was therefore called. Cf. Herodotus, 3, 107.

sion on which we find it serving for holy uses. It oozed from an acacia-like plant, found chiefly in Arabia, and was used dry as a gum, or liquid as an ointment. Its antiseptic qualities caused it to be employed freely for purposes of embalming; and thus it was largely imported into Egypt, (Gen. xxxvii, 25; xliii, 11;) and in a hundred pounds' weight of myrrh and aloes Nicodemus wrapped the dead body of our Lord, (John xix, 39,) so that in his very cradle he receives already the prophecy of his death.*

* It is well known that the dramatic representation of modern Europe grew up under the wing of the Church, and only slowly detached itself from this its earliest shelter. Of the dramatic element, which was allowed to find place in its own services, we have a curious illustration in the manner in which this offering of the Magi was set forth in some churches on the festival of Epiphany. (Binterim, Denkwürdigkeiten, v. 5, p. 316.) Three boys, clothed in silk, with golden crowns upon their heads, and each a golden vessel in his hand, represented the wise men from the East. Entering the choir, and advancing toward the altar, they chanted the following strophe:—

O quam dignis celebranda dies ista laudibus,
In quâ Christi genitura propalatur gentibus,
Pax terrenis nunciatur, gloria cœlestibus;
Novi partûs signum fulget Orientis patriâ.
Currunt reges Orientis stellâ sibi præviâ,

§ 9.—*The Manifestation to the Gentiles.*

And now the first great manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles is complete. It is because the coming of the Magi has ever

> Currunt reges et adorant Deum ad præsepia,
> Tres adorant reges unum, triplex est oblatio.

During the singing of these verses they gradually approached the altar; there the first lifted up the vessel which he held in his hand, exclaiming:—

Aurum primo,
And the second:—
thus secundo,
And the third:—
myrrham dante tertio.

Hereupon, the first once more:—
Aurum regem,
The second:—
thus cœlestem,
And the third:—
mori nutat unctio.

Then one of them pointed with his hand to the star hanging from the roof of the church, and sung in a loud voice: Hoc signum magni Regis; and all three proceeded to make their offerings, singing meanwhile the responsal, Eamus, inquiramus eum, et offeramus ei munera, aurum, thus, et myrrham. At the conclusion of this responsal, a younger boy lifted up his voice, which was meant to imitate the voice of an angel, from behind the altar, and sung: Nuntium vobis fero de supernis; Natus est Christus dominator orbis. In Bethlehem

been contemplated by the Church in the light of such a manifestation, because these wise men have been by it regarded as the ambassadors of the heathen world,* and thus their homage the homage of all, that the day on which they came occupies so prominent a place in our Christian year. That, regarded thus, it should do so, lay in the very nature of things. For us Gentiles that day could be one of no common solemnity or gladness, on which the first significant intimation was given that He who was born King of the Jews, was also He in whom the Gentiles might trust; willing to receive the homage of those who were far off, as well as of those who were near. That day must needs be a great one for us, which showed the Gentiles coming to the brightness of his rising, and not coming only, but drawn thither by an especial leading of his providence and grace; for it is not the day on which the Gentiles

Judæ; sic enim propheta dixerat ante. Hereupon the three who represented the kings withdrew into the sacristy, singing, In Bethlehem natus est Rex cœlorum, &c.

* Chrysostom yet more strongly entitles them—*οἱ τῆς ἐκκλησιας πρόγονοι.*

found Him,—that was but the consequence, —the day is rather that of *his* manifesting of *Himself* to the Gentiles.

Before leaving this visit of the wise men contemplated in the light of an Epiphany, it may be well to observe, that when we speak of it as *the* manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, the words must not be taken to affirm that this was the only one, even in the days of his flesh,—but the first. For as our Lord's open ministry began and ended with a temptation,—began with that of the wilderness, and ended with that of the garden,—exactly so a manifestation to the Gentiles found place in his cradle, and just before his cross. It is indeed curious how slightly we commonly pass over that other and later manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles, which yet St. John relates with so marked an emphasis, which the Lord welcomes with such a solemn gladness, and which is the motive of so deep a discourse of his. (John xii, 20–33.) Seldom or never as that second is brought into relation with this first, there yet exists between them a most real con-

nexion. It is here as with the two temptations, which together include the whole circle of temptation: for exactly so the two manifestations of Christ embrace together the whole Gentile world in its two grand divisions of east and west. This earlier was to the elder East, that later to the younger West. On the last day of our Lord's open presence in the temple certain Greeks desire to see Jesus. (John xii, 21.) What is this but the question over again, "*Where is He that is born King of the Jews?*" The Lord himself recognises all the significance of the moment, and of that request of theirs. It fills him with holy joy; he accepts the augury, beholding in this little band of Greeks another pledge and prophecy of the fulness of the Gentiles that should come in, and the hour as already present in which He would be glorified in them. (Verses 23, 24.)

And surely it is not a little noticeable that as God spake, as we have seen, to those eastern wise men in a symbol of nature, and in that the most suitable to them, by a star, so to those western Greeks in the like, by a corn

of wheat, and the mute prophecy of life out of death which it contained. Lest they should be perplexed and offended at his death, which was so near, He does not refer them to Old-Testament prophecies, according to which it needed that Christ should so suffer. These would have been indeed most fit in the case of Jewish candidates for admission into the circle of his disciples, from whom he would fain remove the offence of his death. (Cf. Luke xxiv, 26, 27; Acts xvii, 3.) But for these Greeks He has another word: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." And if there was a fitness in the star for those eastern watchers of the heavens, there was at least an equal fitness in this image of the corn of wheat for these Greeks. For this truth of life only through death, which was about to be sealed first in Himself, and afterwards in each one of his people, was just the truth which the Greek mind had missed—which in the moral world it had refused to know. They had contemplated the fair and

beautiful forms of this earthly life as the highest which humanity could reach; they had sought to fix these, and had done so in a thousand shapes, in sculpture, in painting, and in poetry, and with a success which no other people had at all approached. But yet they could not fix them forever. There was a worm at the root of all this beauty, because it was not a beauty of holiness; and the whole story of Greek culture, with all its tragic issues, is made plain to us by this single word of our Lord's. In a world of sin, only through the grave and gate of death, only out of a Divine death—a death in God—can any enduring life or beauty come forth; the corn of wheat must die before it can truly live. But this matter would lead us from our immediate theme, and we must not follow it further.

§ 10.—*The Return of the Wise Men.*

But now, the task of these visitors from far being accomplished, and their homage paid, the wicked king shall not be permitted to weave them and their devotedness to the Lord into the dark woof of the treachery which he meditates. They are "*warned of God in a dream that they should not return unto Herod.*" We may well conceive in all dreams more or less of a natural predisposition, so to speak, on the part of the dreamer. The thoughts and sights of day are the stuff out of which the visions of the night are woven; and this would be so in the case of Divine dreams and visions equally as in that of others. Peter is hungry, and to that hunger of his, itself probably more than natural, God is pleased to link on the vision of the sheet full of all manner of objects for the satisfying of his desire. That hunger is used as the first motive for the further teaching which the apostle shall afterwards receive. (Acts x, 13.) It was on the anniver-

sary of the day on which Jerusalem was smitten, when, therefore, the prophet's thoughts must needs have been dwelling on the great desolations of that earthly city, that the glorious vision of the heavenly Jerusalem was vouchsafed to him. (Ezek. xl, 1.) Nebuchadnezzar's proud dream of empire, prophetic as it was, yet was in some sort only a prolongation of his waking thoughts. (Dan. ii, 31.*) Perhaps it was thus also with these wise men. Their interview with the tyrant grown gray in wickedness and crime, may have inspired them only with distrust and fear. The tiger may not have been able effectually to hide his claws. The simpler

* Gregory the Great: A radice cogitationis inchoavit: which Grotius carries out yet further in some admirable remarks on the different symbolism of this vision of the proud king, and the later vision vouchsafed to the righteous prophet himself (Dan. vii, 3): Nabuchodonosoro futura imperia ostenduntur sub facie humanâ, augustâ, grandi, splendidâ; quia ille imperia magni faciebat, et habebat quasi pro diis suis, qui per statuas coli solebant. At Danieli infrà eadem apparent sub ferarum imagine; noverat enim propheta esse omnia ista imperia idololatriæ, ac proinde Diaboli, instrumenta, per quæ tamen, ut et per ipsos diabolos, Deus sua decreta exsequeretur.

they were, the more sure, if not to see through his cunning device, yet to have a feeling and instinct of his falseness; "for to be innocent is nature's wisdom."* In such a suspicion and fear they may have left his presence, and may thus have had a certain predisposition for the Divine revelation which was vouchsafed to them now. But be that as it might, they had this warning of God in a dream, that they should not return to Herod, nor assist him in that act of worship toward the royal Child which he meditated. In obedience to the heavenly monition, "*they departed into their own country another way*"†—a circumstance which has not been left without its mystical and allegorical application.

* As Goethe, who, though not a Christian, yet so often and so wonderfully witnesses for Christian truth, makes the learned Faust to be deceived by Mephistopheles, but the simple Margaret to have a shuddering and instinctive sense of his Satanic nature from the first.

† For their long journey's sake, the Magi are often, in Roman Catholic countries, taken as the patrons of travellers. Thus, in Styria and Carinthia it is common even now to have the initials of their supposed names, C. M. B., (see p. 25,) over the doors of the inns.

All, it has been said, who, like these wise men, have seen Christ, have been admitted into his presence and worshipped Him, will, after that glorious manifestation of Him in their souls, walk in quite another way from that which hitherto they have been treading.* Here we lose sight of these mysterious visitors of the cradle of the Lord, whom, however, the legends of a later day fondly pursued to their own land, out of a sense which in itself was indeed a true one—that their lives could not henceforth have been common ones—that this coming of theirs, which has so great and so lasting a significance for us, must needs have had more than a passing

* Ambrose (Exp. in Luc., l. 2, § 46): Aliâ venerunt viâ magi, aliâ redeunt; qui enim Christum viderant, Christum intellexerant, meliores utique quam venerant, revertuntur. Augustine (Serm. 202, c. 3): Nos ergo, carissimi, quorum erant illi magi primitiæ, nos hæreditas Christi usque ad terminos terræ . . . . sic eum annuntiemus in hâc terrâ, in hâc regione carnis nostræ, ut non quâ venimus redeamus, nec prioris nostræ conversationis vestigia repetamus. Hoc est enim quod et illi magi, non quâ venerant, redierunt. Via mutata, vita mutata est. For a slightly different use of this their returning by another way, see Tertullian, De Idololat., c. 9.

significance for themselves. But with these we have not to do.*

* There is a sketch done with exquisite grace, of the whole legendary lore which in the middle ages gradually clustered round the brief Scriptural account of the Magi, in an article on the Cathedral of Cologne, in the *Quarterly Review*, 1846, v. lxxviii, p. 433–437. The very popular story-book from which it is drawn, and which, of course, did but, in the main, gather up the legends already existing, was composed by Johannes von Hildesheim, who died in 1375. and it has much to tell of the first arrival of these Magi from their own land. Kings of three different regions in India, of Godolia, Saba, and Tharsis, they arrived each with his numerous retinue in the immediate neighbourhood of Jerusalem, by separate routes, and unknown to each other, and only there at its gates discovered that the same errand, and the same star, had drawn them all. It has much also to tell of Herod's fear, as, with their united trains, in numbers like an army, they rode through the streets of Jerusalem; of their own amazement at the unutterable light which filled the lowly hut where they found the infant Lord; so that, instead of all the costly treasures which they had brought to offer, they presented each what came first to hand—a little gold, some frankincense, and some myrrh. And not to dwell on much else, wonderfully characteristic of that fresh spring of poetry which, in those ages, was everywhere bubbling up, we have in this little Volksbuch all the later history of the kings, from the time that we lose sight of them in the sacred records. We learn how they were baptized by St. Thomas, the apostle of India, and assisted him in the preaching of the Gospel there, and how at length they sealed the faith of Christ with their blood. Nor does

§ 11.—*The Flight into Egypt.*

It was after the departure of the Magi,—we are not told how soon after, and our estimate of the interval that had elapsed will be affected by many considerations,—that Joseph was warned, and by the same channel of communication, "*to take the young Child and his mother and flee into Egypt.*" That land was one at once so near, and of such easy access, that we find it continually serving as a place of refuge for those who on any account desired to make swift escape from Palestine; (Jer. xxvi, 21; xliii, 7; 1 Kings xi, 40;) while yet, near as it was, it had this advantage, that it lay beyond the jurisdiction of Herod. But beside these obvious reasons for its selection, it was a land which had already played its part in the two great crises of the early history of the fleshly Israel,—then when, with

this history leave them till after many vicissitudes it at length brings their bones to Cologne, the city of the three kings, which even now believes itself enriched with these relics, and in its cathedral would fain rear a shrine worthy to contain them.

Jacob, the children of Israel came down thither; and, again, when Moses led them out of that land,—and it should therefore now fitly play its part again in the early history of the spiritual Israel, as concentrated in Christ.* The words, "*Be thou there until I bring thee word*," intimate another revelation in reserve for Joseph. He should take no single step in behalf of this Child committed to his guardianship without a distinct leading and intimation of God's will. For of Him, even more than of any other, that word should be true, that his times should be in his Father's hands.

Joseph, aroused from sleep, at once "*took the young Child and his mother by night, and*

* Thus Leo the Great (Serm. 32): At ille, qui sanguinem suum pro mundi redemtione fundendum in aliam differret ætatem, Ægypto se parentum ministerio subvectus intulerat, repetens scilicet Hebrææ gentis antiqua cunabula, et principatum veri Joseph majoris providentiæ potestate disponens, ut illam diriorem omni inediâ famem quâ Ægyptiorum mentes veritatis inopiâ laborabant, veniens de cœlo Panis vitæ et cibus rationis auferret; nec sine illâ regione pararetur singularis hostiæ sacramentum, in quâ primum occisione agni, salutiferum Crucis signum et Pascha Domini fuerat præformatum.

departed into Egypt." This "*by night*" may not indicate any more than the promptness of his obedience, so that without delay, that very night, he commenced the journey; or, seeing that there is no "*by night*" mentioned on the occasion of his return, (verse 21,)* the word may very well also imply the urgent peril of the time, which, as he rightly understood, would brook no delay, but made it needful that their flight should be at once instant and secret—instant, lest the bloody emissaries of Herod should be upon them; secret, lest, if the way which they had taken were known, these might follow the fugitives on their track.

These perils of the infancy of our Lord have their historic and their mythic anticipations and counterparts—in Moses, their historic; in many, and notably in the real or assumed founders of religions and of empires, Cyrus and Romulus, for example, their my-

* Jerome, who notes this, seems to hint something mystical in this "*by night*," like that "it was night" when the traitor Judas went forth upon his errand, (John xiii, 30;) that the present was even an "hour and power of darkness."

thic. This last circumstance is nothing strange; for when we regard Christ as the central Man of humanity, we shall feel that it was only to be expected, that in Him should repeat themselves, in a higher form, many of the incidents which had found place, or had been imagined to find place, in other notable personages of history. For how many shadows took substance, how many dreams became realities in Him! The sense that the world of unrighteousness will be up in arms against the mighty redresser of wrongs—and as such, it must be remembered, the legends about these in each case describe them—that it will have an instinct of his appearance, and will endeavour to tread out, while it is yet a tiny spark, that fire which shall one day consume it,—this sense men have everywhere had; and with this, and as the consequence of this, they have felt that his very infancy shall not be secure—that there shall be plots of hell against the heavenly Destroyer, long ere he has put forth his destroying might; that the future Hercules will have to strangle serpents in his

cradle. Nor has men's consciousness of this failed to find its utterance in a thousand shapes, which, fabulous in part or altogether, did yet point at, and bear witness for, that which should be wholly true.*

How, then, should this trait have been wanting here? We may say with reverence, that it scarcely could have been absent in the life of Him with whom we now have to do. The great strife between light and darkness which runs through all history, had now reached at once its very deepest ground and its highest height. In every other witness for the light there was something, oftentimes much, of the darkness which he went forth to combat; but here was light in which was no darkness at all. The whole might and malice of hell must therefore array itself against this purest manifestation of the opposing kingdom; and whatever hostility

* Thus in the Mohammedan tradition—which is also a Jewish, though probably a later Jewish one—about Abraham, the same or similar perils beset him at his birth, from Nimrod, whose idolatrous empire Abraham shall afterwards overthrow. (D'Herbelot, Biblioth. Orient., art. Abraham.)

it had put forth against that kingdom of light before, and in its lower forms, must repeat itself with a deadlier intensity now against its crowning manifestation in the person of the Son of God. In this respect the perils of our Lord's cradle run parallel to those with which his ministry began—to those of his temptation; with, of course, the difference, that in these the enemy makes war against Christ's natural, in those, against his spiritual, life. But there was the same "needs be" for that passage of his life as for this. In Christ's appearance as the great Head of the kingdom of righteousness, there lay the necessity that he should encounter, not temptations only, which every man has done, but *the* temptation—that in which the whole force of all which entices and allures from God should be brought to bear against Him. Being to destroy the whole kingdom of darkness, He must needs encounter at the very threshold of his life—life natural and life spiritual---the whole concentrated might and malignity of the evil one.

Of the incidents which must have accom-

panied the Lord's flight into Egypt, we have no authentic details; nor yet of his abode there. The freer and more welcome, therefore, the field which this portion of his life offered to the inventors of the apocryphal gospels; nor have they failed to avail themselves of the license which this silence of sacred history afforded them, to expatiate freely in the region of fiction which thus lay open before them.* Tradition makes the

* In the Evangelium Infantiæ, now existing only in an Arabic version, but resting probably on a Syriac original, the flight into Egypt, and the adventures in Egypt, with the wonders that were there wrought by and in behalf of the Child Jesus, occupy several chapters, c. 9–26. (Thilo's Codex Apocryphus, pp. 73–95.) These miracles and adventures are, for the most part, childish and unedifying enough; yet of the former, there is one to which Athanasius once alludes, which is worthily conceived—the fall of the chief idol of Egypt at the presence of the Lord in the land, (c. 10,) though the hint for it was, doubtless, obtained from Isa. xix, 1, which was thought to find its fulfilment therein: "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence." (Cf. 1 Sam. v, 3, 4.) This apocryphal book makes the time spent in Egypt to have been three years, c. 26. Unaware of the real facts of the case, which would not have lent even a semblance to the charge, and that the time passed in Egypt was that of the Lord's tenderest infancy, the early

place where the holy family tarried during their abode there to have been Matarea, in the neighbourhood of that temple, rival to the temple at Jerusalem, which Onias, a fugitive priest, had erected at Heliopolis about a hundred and fifty years before.

But in this—the Lord's abode in Egypt, with his subsequent bringing back from that land—the evangelist notes the fulfilment of a prophecy: He "*was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.*"* The words

adversaries of Christianity were wont to charge Him with having brought his miraculous, or, as they said, magical, powers from Egypt, which was esteemed the very home of these secret and mysterious arts—the land to which, if you divided the magic of the world into ten parts, nine would rightly belong. Thus the heathen in Arnobius (Adv. Gent., l. 3, c. 43): Magus fuit; clandestinis artibus omnia illa perfecit: Ægyptiorum ex adytis angelorum potentia nomina et remotas furatus est disciplinas. Cf. Origen, Con. Cels., l. i, c. 28, 38; Eusebius, Dem. Evang., l. 3, c. 6; Eisenmenger, Entdeckt. Judenth., v. i, pp. 149, 166; Schoettgen, Hor. Hebr., v. 2, p. 699.

* In this quotation St. Matthew departs altogether from the Septuagint, which, indeed, would not at all have answered his purpose, (ἐξ Αἰγύπτου μετεκάλεσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτοῦ,) and attaches himself more closely to the

are from Hosea xi, 1; for Origen's suggestion,[8] whom Eusebius of Cæsarea follows, that they may be drawn from Num. xxiv. 8, "God brought him forth out of Egypt," has found no acceptance; as, indeed, it would be difficult to suppose that by "*the prophet*" St. Matthew intended Balaam, as must then be the case. Nor is it to be doubted that, in their primary sense, the words are not prophetic, but historic, and recount a past benefit to Israel, which here, as in other places, is contemplated in its totality, and called God's son, his first-born; that they have reference to his earlier goodness, in the great deliverance of the children of Israel from their land of bondage. The fitness of their application to the later act of a mightier preservation, rests on the fact that the calling of Israel out of Egypt at that earlier day did stand in a typical and prophetic relation to the later bringing back of Him who was God's own Son out of the same land. As

Hebrew original, which has the singular he needed, and not the plural.

[8] In Num. Hom. 17.

this application of the passage has often been spoken against,—Julian the Apostate, for instance, affirming that St. Matthew had endeavoured to impose on the simplicity of Gentile readers, and palm on them a passage as prophetic of Christ, which, in truth, had no relation to Him,*—it will not be lost labour a little to consider what are the analogies which explain and justify the application of the prophet's words to the matter in hand—what right the evangelist had to find, in that glorious event in the past history of Israel, a prophecy of that which did now a second time, and yet more gloriously, fulfil itself. Of course, to make these analogies more than a mere fanciful playing with the earlier Scripture on the part of the later evangelist, which we dare not attribute to him, we must believe that they ground

* Jerome (in loc.): Ut simplicitati eorum qui de Gentibus crediderant, illuderet. A most unhappy calumny, as Jerome replies; since, apart from the question of fitness or unfitness of the application to Christ, that could not have been *his* motive, who wrote in Hebrew, and, as all are agreed, in his first intention not for Gentile converts, but for the circle of Hebrew Christians alone.

themselves in the intentions of God, and are not merely traced by the ingenuity of man—we must believe that it belonged to his eternal purpose that the earlier should in manifold ways prefigure the later; and that among the other witnesses for a Divine intention running through the whole history of Israel, He was graciously willing that this should not be wanting.

In the first place, then, Israel being by the prophet called God's son, is contemplated, not on its fleshly side—not in its degeneracy, and as it fell short of the idea for which it was constituted,—but in so far as it realized the idea, only as such was it typical of Christ, who was a concentrated Israel, bearing this very name. (Isa. xlix, 3.) Alike for Israel contemplated thus, and for Christ, Egypt was a place of shelter. *They* went down thither when in danger of perishing by famine, *He* by the sword. It was in each case not by the will of man, but under the direct leadings and interpositions of God's providence, that He and they sought shelter in a land, which, as eminently the land of idols, the

unclean land, might have seemed beforehand the unfittest for them.* Both were thus withdrawn for a season from the true land which was appointed to them as that in which their work was to be accomplished, but to which, after a temporary stay in Egypt, in both cases they returned; Israel being called out of Egypt to show forth the glory of God to the world, as in a like, and only in a far higher, sense was Christ. In either case, God's grace and providence were wonderfully displayed, alike in the shelter which Egypt yielded for awhile, and in the calling out of Egypt for the fulfilment of a glorious destiny.

* Calvin: Posset enim alioqui hic obstrepere carnis sensus, Scilicet ex Ægypto venturus est Redemptor? Matthæus ergo non esse novum vel insolens admonet, quod Deus Filium inde sibi vocet, ac potius hoc ad fidei nostræ confirmationem valere, quod sicuti olim, ita nunc de integro nascatur ex Ægypto Dei Ecclesia. Hoc modo est diversum, quod olim totus populus Ægypti ergastulo inclusus fuerit: in secundâ autem redemptione solum Ecclesiæ caput Christus illic latuerit; sed qui omnium salutem et vitam in se inclusam gestabat.

§ 12.—*The Slaughter of the Innocents.*

"*Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth.*"—not that there was any intention on their parts to mock him: all that they meant was, not to allow themselves to be made the tools and instruments of his wickedness: but Scripture here, as in so many other places—we have already noticed one—speaks *phenomenally*, as from their point of view, with whom at the moment it has to do. As it does this here in the historical, so also in other places in the natural and in the ethical worlds. In the *natural*, when it is content to speak in the common language of men of the sun rising and setting: in the *ethical*, when, for example, St. Paul speaks of "the foolishness of God," "the weakness of God," (1 Cor. i, 25.)—of that which appears to men as such; when he so far puts himself for the moment in their place as to speak their language. Thus is it here: Herod counted that the wise men mocked him: there was most truly One

that mocked him in them, but *his* mockings Herod could not see—for his ways are far above, out of the sight of such men as this.

"The king's wrath is the messenger of death," though not now the death of Him at whom he aimed, for He was "the elect among ten thousand." Cant. v, 10. But Herod, counting that in the death of all, the one would surely be included, "*sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men.*"

Thus early it proved true that Christ brought a cross with him—that to be drawn into his circle was to be drawn into the mysterious circle of pain. What fitter prologue could there have been to the great tragedy of Christianity, in which feeble women, innocent children, wailing mothers, have the foremost parts allotted to them still? And inasmuch as Christ himself suffered in these children who suffered for him, we may say that here already the sufferings of Christ commenced. And if to any it

should seem that for Him was reserved the easier lot, that He lived while others died, yet let it be remembered that He was spared only for a longer agony, and a sharper doom. He was withdrawn from that sword, and from its momentary pang, that He might be baptized with his long baptism of pain; and that, saved from Herod's sword, He might one day hang upon Pilate's cross.

In nothing, certainly, does the Church's just estimate of the relative value of the temporal and the eternal manifest itself more clearly than in the boldness with which she has dared to call these children blessed, the little day of whose earthly life was so abruptly and prematurely closed.[o] In nothing

[o] Dulces animæ, quas ante nefas
Letum rapuit, quas subductas
Vitæ pelago, nunc portus habet;
Non vos illic spes sollicitæ,
Non ambitio, non dira fames
Exercet opum, major habenti;
Non sævities, grassata semel,
Quæ securos invasit adhuc,
Finemque dedit, vixdum expertis,
Nosse malorum. Nunc parta quies,
Interque pias, fati immemores
Lætosque dies, ducitis, umbras.

The quotation is from the Herodes Infanticida of Daniel Heinsius, which was much admired in its day. It is a

does the tenderness of the Church—her true sense of the overflowing grace of Him who is her Head—come out more strongly than in the light in which she has ever regarded them and their deaths,—than in the title of "Holy Innocents" which she has not feared to give them. For just as, to take a slighter example, it has been confidently assumed of Simon the Cyrenian, that the labour and the ignominy even of that compelled bearing of Christ's cross (Matt. xxvii, 32) was afterwards repaid him in a saving knowledge of Him under whose burden he then came—whose load thus far he lightened; so has the Church been bold to conclude that it was not for nothing, as regarded themselves, that these infants were thus entangled in the tragic destinies of their Lord. She has confidently assumed, that nearness to Him did not bring to them merely their early doom and their baptism of blood; but that, uncon-

tragedy on the model of Seneca's, and of very moderate worth; but these lines, making part of a chorus in which the angels gratulate the slain children, are pretty, though they reach not the earlier strains in which the Church has celebrated their martyrdoms.

scious martyrs though they were, still martyrdom was imputed to them;* and all the hardhearted arguments to the contrary† are nothing worth against that true instinctive sense out of which it has been ever felt that what they thus endured for Christ's sake

* Cyprian, Ep. 52: Ætas necdum habilis ad pugnam, idonea extitit ad coronam.

† How different these from the language of affection and tenderness in which they and their early death have been regarded by the elder teachers of the Church. Thus Augustine, from whose words here quoted we infer that their martyrdom already found contradiction in his day (Serm. 373): O parvuli beati, modo nati, nunquam tentati, nondum luctati, jam coronati. Ille de vestrâ coronâ dubitaverit in passione pro Christo, qui etiam baptismum parvulis prodesse non existimat Christi. And the author of a sermon that used to be ascribed to Augustine: O quam beata ætas, quæ necdum Christum potest loqui, et jam pro Christo meretur occidi. Quam feliciter nati, quibus in primo nascendi limine æterna vita obviam venit! Incurrunt quidem inter ipsa primordia acceptæ lucis periculum et finem salutis, sed de ipso protinus fine capiunt principia æternitatis. Immaturi quidem videntur ad mortem, sed feliciter moriuntur ad vitam. Vixdum gustarunt præsentem, statim transeunt ad futuram. Nondum egressi infantiæ cunas, et jam perveniunt ad coronas. Rapiuntur quidem a complexibus matrum, sed redduntur gremiis angelorum. And once more: Jure dicuntur martyrum flores, quos in medio frigore infidelitatis exortos velut primas erumpentis ecclesiæ gemmas quædam persecutionis pruina decoxit.

was repaid them again; that for them also, martyrs but in deed, that word did yet come true, "Near to the sword, is near also to God."*

But the "*two years old and under*"—this superfluous cruelty, as it has seemed, of Herod, this bloody execution, directed not merely against the new-born infants, but against all the male children up to two years of age, has at all times perplexed many. And from this *they* have derived one of their chief arguments, who place the visit of the Magi not during the first days of the Lord's earthly existence, but very much later. On this there will be occasion by and by to speak: for the present, it will be sufficient to observe that the "*two years old*" need not compel us to any such conclusion. What Herod wanted was to make sure of reaching

Thus, too, Leo the Great, (Serm. 31:) Quasi jam diceret: Sinite parvulos venire ad me, talium est enim regnum cœlorum; novâ gloriâ coronabat infantes, et de initiis suis parvulorum primordia consecrabat: ut discerctur neminem hominum divini incapacem esse sacramenti, quando etiam illa ætas gloriæ esset apta martyrii.

* Ignatius (Ad Smyrn., 4): Ἐγγὺς μαχαίρας, ἐγγὺς Θεοῦ.

the dreaded Child. Some time must have elapsed while he was waiting for the return of the wise men, and before he could persuade himself that he was mocked by them; some more, perhaps, before he determined on this method of delivering himself from his fears. The emissaries that he employed were not such as he could trust to make very nice distinctions. He was determined there should be no mistakes, and gave himself, therefore, this broad margin, lest, had he calculated too nearly,* the one at whom he aimed should by some chance have escaped him. The same determination at all costs to make all sure, appears in his command that the children should be slain, not in Bethlehem alone, to which yet the answer of the Sanhedrim alone had pointed, but "*in all the coasts thereof.*"

The assailants of Holy Scripture have at different times urged against the credibility of this whole account, the extreme unlikelihood that Herod, to whom none can deny the

* So Grotius: Herodes omni modo cavens ne puer elaberetur, latius sævitiam extendit.

character of a sagacious and far-sighted politician, should have trusted to such a weak device as this, when he might so much more securely have laid hands on the young Child; and they give us not seldom to understand how much more effectually they would have conducted the affair if it had been in their hands. But although, arguing from the result, men have called it this weak device, did that deserve to be so considered, which would have perfectly succeeded, had not the providence of God directly interfered to defeat and bring it to nothing? How much more certain were they who sought the Child in love to discover Him, than he would be, seeking Him in hate; how much more prudent to use their love for his own ends than by any premature step to cause the object of his fear to be forever withdrawn from his power,—not to say, that there must have been every motive at work in him which should induce him to conceal from the people his hatred of David's Son, and to proceed against Him by plot and stratagem rather than by open violence; and who would

here serve him better than these harmless enthusiasts from the East, as he must have esteemed them?

And even if this was such a weak device, and one sure to fail, is not this the very character of wickedness, that it makes the most inexplicable oversights? Does not this psychological fact repeat itself evermore in the world's history, that its cunning fails it at the critical moment when there was most need that it should stand? There are some, indeed, who will never make allowance for the wicked acting blindly. They do not at heart believe that which Origen says on this very conduct of King Herod, that wickedness in its very nature is something blind.* Yet who can read the history of great criminals without meeting there the most striking confirmations of this fact—devices woven, in great measure, with the most wondrous skill and foresight, and yet failing, and grossly failing, in some single point, omitting some most obvious precaution? There is something which they have not taken into calcu-

* Τυφλὸν γάρ τι ἐστιν ἡ πονηρία. (Con. Cels., i, 61.)

lation. They have worked their sum with only the leaving out of one factor—yet that one sufficient to disturb the whole result; for that one is God—even He who "taketh the wise in their own craftiness," who "turneth the way of the ungodly upside down." Job v, 13; Psa. cxlvi, 9.

But, further, it has excited the surprise of some, nor has this circumstance been left unused by the adversaries of the faith, that no mention should occur of so remarkable an incident as this in profane history; and, most of all, that all allusion to it should be wanting in Josephus, who is otherwise so large in narrating the life, and so free in noticing the atrocities, of Herod.

Yet it is not entirely true that there is no allusion to it in profane history. Certainly some have affirmed that Macrobius, to whom alone we are indebted for such, was no heathen, but a Christian, and that his, therefore, was evidently no independent witness; or, if they could not prove this, they have wished that the question whether he were a Christian or heathen should be considered as an

unsettled one; but the internal proofs of his belonging to the remains of the heathen party are so strong, or, at any rate, so sufficient, that it is difficult not to suspect some motive at work in those who have stood out against evidence so clear.* He, then,—this heathen grammarian, writing at the beginning of the fifth century, in a collection of the jests and witty sayings of illustrious men,—records this among the keen sayings of Augustus:—That when he heard that among the children under two years old whom Herod, king of the Jews, had commanded to be slain in Syria, his own son had been included, he observed, "It is better to be Herod's *swine* than his *son*."† We catch a slight echo of this *sanglant* pun in the similarity of our words, "*son*" and "*swine*:" it does not, that is, disappear so entirely in English as it does in the Latin of Macrobius.

* See the Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Ant., art. Macrobius; and Bähr's Gesch. Rom. Literatur, p. 600.

† Saturn., l. 2, c. 4: Quum audisset [Augustus] inter pueros, quos in Syriâ Herodes rex Judæorum intra bimatum jussit interfici, filium quoque ejus occisum, ait, melius esse Herodis porcum [*ὗν*] quam filium [*υἱόν*.]

Scaliger has called this bitter sarcasm of Augustus into doubt; he wonders, at least, how it could have fallen from him, and on the very insufficient ground, that Augustus had himself given Herod leave to execute his sons. But if ever there was a saying that bore the stamp of being his to whom it has been attributed, it is this. How much of the Roman, and of Augustus in particular, speaks out in it: his own affected, perhaps in part real, clemency, (he had urged Herod, even while he gave him the permission, not to put his sons to death;) his contempt for the Jew, and for his ceremonial law—most of all, for his abstinence from swine's flesh, the favourite meat of the Roman;* yea, his very ill-will at having had his consent asked and obtained for such atrocities as these;—all of this seems to find its utterance here.

But although the *mot* may thus be considered as itself lifted above all suspicion, and is found recorded in the writings of a heathen author, I yet cannot consider

* Juvenal (Sat. 14, 98) describing the Jews:—

Nec distare putant humanâ carne suillam.

the confirmation of the sacred history which it yields so real as some have been inclined to count it. Living as Macrobius did at the beginning of the fifth century,—that is, when the knowledge of the Christian Scriptures and of the facts which they recorded had penetrated everywhere, even into those few fortresses of heathendom which still remained, such as the neo-platonism to which Macrobius was himself probably addicted,—there is no sufficient ground for affirming that this is an independent witness for the truth of this event, or that his knowledge of it was derived elsewhere than from Scripture itself. In all probability, it was drawn mediately or directly from thence.* It will be observed, that the emperor's jest is complete,

* The intra limina looks wonderfully as if it had grown out of the ἀπὸ διετοῦς καὶ κατωτέρω of the evangelist. Of still slighter worth as an independent heathen testimony, is the passage about the Magians and the star, so often quoted from Chalcidius, who himself was also a Neo-Platonist, flourishing probably in the sixth, though some have placed him in the fourth, century. The passage which begins,—Est quoque alia sanctior et venerabilis historia,—is but a reproduction, in weaker outline, of the sacred narrative. See the

even after all that refers to the massacre of the innocents is withdrawn from it; that this massacre adds nothing to its point—that point lying in the fact that he who would not kill a swine had put to death three of his own sons; and, further, that the connecting link by which the massacre of the children of Bethlehem is brought into relation with this saying is one historically inexact—namely, the assumption on the part of Macrobius, that among the children who there perished was one of Herod's own;* for the supposition of Baronius and some others,† which has no other ground than this present passage, that there was such a child of his,

Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Biog., under his name, which considers it uncertain whether Chalcidius was not a Christian after all.

* Some, indeed, have attempted to make *inter* pueros "at the same time as the children," with allusion to the fact that Antipater's execution must have been very nearly contemporaneous. So J. Masson, in an essay of but moderate value, The Slaughter of the Children in Bethlehem as an historical fact vindicated, Lond., 1728, p. 23.

† Keppler, for instance, (De Anno Nat. Christi, p. 130): Credibile infantem et ipsum, ex pellice Bethleemiticâ. Herod was now seventy years old.

whom, by a just judgment of God, he included either intentionally or by accident in this slaughter,—this supposition, however striking, is yet without a shadow of historic probability. How Macrobius came to confuse these two events,—Herod's putting to death of his own sons, and murdering the children at Bethlehem,—it is not very hard to see: the sons were put to death under the charge of affecting their father's throne and life; and these children, lest a competitor to that throne, and one that should endanger that life, should be found among them.

I do not think, then, that we can honestly draw his testimony into a confirmation of the Scriptural account. But if we do not find a confirmation therein, neither do we need one. Did we regard St. Matthew merely in the light of an historian to be believed until he shall prove himself unworthy of credit, there would be nothing here which we might not readily receive, as we receive ten thousand other events of ancient history, if credible in themselves, on the faith of some single witness. There is nothing in this massacre alien

from the character of Herod.* Any one who is acquainted with, and calls to mind, the cruel precautions of eastern monarchs, in times past and present, in regard of possible competitors for their throne, often making an entire desolation even of their own kindred round them, will see in this what many an eastern despot would have done—what certainly an Herod would not have shrunk from doing.† The man who could put his wife and three of his own sons to death; who made a

* Schlosser, the historian, who certainly would not count himself under any obligation to receive a fact because he found it in the Bible, acknowledges the internal probability of this massacre.

† The sense of the worth of life while it is as yet undeveloped, that is, of child's life, can hardly be said to belong in any very high degree except to Christianity. How little the moral feeling of antiquity revolted from precautions such as Herod's, where great political interests seemed at stake, we have evidence in the story, and the evidence is equally good, whether that be true or false, which Julius Marathus, the freedman of Augustus, told in his life of the emperor, and which Suetonius (Octavius, 89) has preserved for us. Among the indications of the emperor's future greatness there went such distinct portents before his birth, that nature was about to bring forth a king of the Roman people, that the senate enacted, no child born during the following year should be reared, (senatum exterritum censuisse, ne quis illo anno genitus educaretur:) however, those senators whose

solitude round him by the slaughter of so many of his friends; who could kill under semblance of sport, as he did, the youthful high priest Aristobulus;* who, when he was himself dying by horrible and loathsome diseases, so far from being softened, or owning the hand of God which every one else saw therein, could devise such a devilish wickedness as that narrated by Josephus, to secure weeping and lamentation at his death,† would have had little scruple in conceiving or carrying out an iniquity such as the sacred historian lays here to his charge.

wives were then pregnant hindered the final carrying of the bill to the treasury.

* Josephus, Ant., xv, 3, 3.

† It troubled him greatly to anticipate the joy which there would be among the Jews at his death; and with the purpose of turning this joy into weeping, he got together from every city the chief personages of the land, whom he shut up in the hippodrome of Jericho, where he lay dying. He then obtained a promise from his sister Salome and her husband, that the instant he expired these all should be slain, so that, although none wept and lamented him, there should yet be abundant weeping and lamentation at his death. His intentions were not better fulfilled than those of tyrants after their deaths commonly are. (B. J., 33. 6, 8.)

Nor need the silence of Josephus surprise us. In the first place, it is probable that we all unconsciously exaggerate very much the number of those who perished in this slaughter. A small country town, (St John calls it a κώμη, vii, 62,) even with the inclusion of its neighbourhood, could have yielded no such multitude of male children under two years old, as many take for granted. In the Romish martyrologies they swell, indeed, to an army of martyrs in themselves. The numbers suggested are sometimes such as almost to provoke a smile. Thus, an expositor of that Church makes mention of some who had estimated the number of the slain at one hundred and forty-four thousand; Rev. xiv, 1, being the motive to this particular number. He, however, himself cannot believe that a little country town could have supplied so many, and is content with supposing them to have been fourteen thousand. In all likelihood, they were very much fewer than an hundredth part of this number, though a good many more than the "ten or twelve," at which number some have rated them.

Such an act would have been but a drop of water in the great sea of Herod's cruelties and crimes; taken, that is, apart from its true connexion, and not seen as the endeavour to kill the Lord's Christ. And there was every motive in Herod to induce him to keep out of sight this connexion;* and not merely this, but to effect the slaughter itself with as little noise as possible. As at first he sent for the wise men "*privily*," (ver. 7,) so there is every reason to conclude that these murders also were accomplished as secretly as the nature of things would allow; the children were exactly, as we say, made away with. Every reason existed why Herod should have sought to effect their deaths with the exciting of as little attention as possible. No tyrant willingly confesses that he trembles upon his throne; to which we may add, that Herod in all things sought to flatter the nation's expectations of a Messiah, and would

* Spanheim, in his excellent Dubia Evang., LXXVI., has suggested this: Quid obstat etiam quominus dicamus stragem illam dissimulatam forte a tyranno, et alio prætextu, alio titulo editum, et militum potius vel satellitum furori ascriptam quam Herodi?

not have ventured thus openly to show and to avow his deadly hatred to David's son. To the Christian historian, the death of these little ones, that died for Him who one day should die for them and for all, had the deepest significance, and must needs find place in his story. But how easily might it have escaped the notice of the Jewish historian; or, even if he had known it, how certainly must he, traitor as he was to the dearest hope of his nation, to its hope of a Christ, have missed, or, not missing, have yet refused to acknowledge, the connexion which alone would have given it a right to a place in history.*

"*Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because*

* There are two Essays devoted to this subject, which, however, I have not had the opportunity of consulting. M. Reis; Josephi silentium Evang. Hist. non noxium esse, Altorf, 1730. And Vollborth, De causis cur Josephus cædem puerorum Bethleh. silentio præterierit, Gött. 1788.

they are not." No one will, I suppose, affirm that this prophecy of Jeremiah (xxxi, 15) was then exclusively, or then first fulfilled, in that bitter wailing of these Bethlehemite mothers over their slaughtered infants; or deny that the prophecy had a most real fulfilment before, in the desolation of that whole region through the carrying away, by Nebuzaradan of the children of the captivity. Nor ought we, I think, to affect to find no difficulty in that "*Then was fulfilled,*" with which St. Matthew claims the prophecy as belonging to the history which he is telling. Yet, as I cannot but think, a great part of the difficulty of the passage, and of its seemingly only remote relation to the matter which the Evangelist has in hand, springs from our stopping short with the words which he actually quotes, and not viewing them in and with the context wherein they stand in Jeremiah. It is, for many reasons, hardly possible to suppose that St. Matthew intended his readers to stop short with the words he cites, and not to embrace the whole prophecy in their minds, and silently to extend his

"*then was fulfilled*" to it all. Merely the desolation of those mothers, merely the fact that there were such, refusing to be comforted, this had no such deep religious significance in it, as should have claimed for it a place in St. Matthew's narration; but the sorrow which is turned into joy—the tears which God causes to flow, and then himself presently wipes away from the eyes—the life which he brings out of death,—these have a very profound significance; and of such gracious dealings of God—chastening, yet not killing; casting down, yet not utterly destroying—Jeremiah is there plainly speaking.

When, indeed, the ten tribes had been carried away captive, and now the two were submitted to a like doom, it must *have seemed* as if all was over, as if Israel's part in the world's history were now played out, as if its hope had utterly perished from the Lord. And the better to express this, Rachel, as a faithful mother in Israel, is introduced by the prophet—the personification does not belong to the heart, but only to the outer clothing, of the prophecy, being probably suggested by

the nearness of Rachel's grave to Rama,* the spot where the forlorn band of captives, bound for a distant land, were assembled, (Jer. xl, 1,)—she is introduced as though disturbed in her grave by this bearing away of her children, these "sons of her sorrow," (Gen. xxxv, 18,) into a hopeless captivity. She has travailed for them, and given them life with her death, in vain. She will hear of no better hope: she refuses to be comforted. And yet this is but a passing note of sadness, presently swallowed up in the more prevailing harmonies of the chapter. The Lord himself is her comforter: He bids her to refrain her voice from weeping, and her eyes from tears. The children whom she accounts lost shall yet come again from the land of the enemy. (Verses 16, 17.) So was it then; and now once more that lamentation is renewed. To the weeping mothers of a later day—those, too, gathered up, and personified in the same image of Rachel

* Rama was only a short half-day's journey from Bethlehem, (Judges xix, 2, 9, 13;) quite near to which was Rachel's grave. (Gen. xxxv, 8.)

mourning for her lost offspring—to them, also, it must have seemed that they had brought forth in vain—children for the murderer. And as many of them as were true mothers in Israel, waiting the consolation of Israel, the bitterest of *their* wailing must have been, that with their own, He also had perished, (for they could not have supposed it otherwise,) that should have redeemed Israel, in whom its whole hope centered, and all its blessed future was laid up. With their sons, the sword of the false Idumæan had found out also the royal Child, even the Son of David. And in the sense of their own and of Israel's woe, they "*would not be comforted.*" Their children "were not;" so, at least, to them it seemed. And yet they were; for thus, by the aid of the prophet, we must complete the thought of the evangelist: they were, for He was, He had escaped the tyrant's sword, in whom alike they and the mothers that bare them should find their true life,—and with that life, a recompense for this, as for every pang. He was, who was the resurrection and the life, and there-

fore they should yet come again from the land of the enemy, the land of darkness and the grave, to which they had thus prematurely been borne.*

§ 13.—*The Time of the Magi's Visit.*

I HAVE deferred to the present moment a question which cannot be overlooked altogether,—namely, in what period of the history of the infancy are the visit of the Magi, and the subsequent flight into Egypt, to find their place?—or, supposing that we separate them in time from one another, their places? In the ancient Church it was almost universally held that the day on which the wise

* Spanheim does not seem to me to have fully seized the force and purpose of the citation, yet to have done so more nearly than most. (Dub. Evang., 82–84): Sic etiam tacite a Matthæo citatione cladis illius et planctûs insinuantur lectoribus consolationes eximiæ quæ abundant toto illo capite, de reliquiarum conservatione, et amore Dei in suum populum, ut ostenderet Matthæus, nihilo magis strage illâ detractum fuisse Dei populo vel regno Christi, ac olim deportatione populi in captivitatem; Deum reliquias suas et semen sanctum semper servaturum, et curaturum, ut tandem emergat, et ab ipso ferro tyrannorum nova sumat incrementa.

men appeared at Bethlehem was the thirteenth inclusive after the Saviour's birth; and the 25th of December being accepted as the day of the Nativity, the 6th of January was consequently kept as this Epiphany, or manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.* Not a few in modern times have taken the same view, or, at least, have placed this visit before the presentation of Christ in the temple,—that is, within the first forty days of the Saviour's life. (Lev. xii, 2, 4.)† At the same time most of the modern harmonists place the visit of the Magi later,—that is, after the presentation in the temple; and some very much after it, so that it shall not have taken place till the Child Jesus had reached, or nearly had reached, his second year. It is a matter of necessity that those who take this last view should accept the calculations which place our Lord's birth as far back as the year 747 U. C.; for since Herod

* Augustine, Serm. 203, § 1.

† So Petavius, Grotius, Chemnitz, Jansenius, and Spanheim, who, in his Dub. Evangel., 25, 26, weighs the whole matter in the main excellently well.

died quite early in 750, only so will room be allowed for events which must have happened before that event. There is no reason why others should not combine this date of 747 with their schemes also; but for this scheme no later date can possibly be adopted.

The advantages of placing the wise men's visit at so late a period, and the inducements thereunto, which, however, I will say beforehand, do not seem to me sufficient to outweigh the inconveniences, are chiefly these: —1. There is no need, then, to set an interval of time between the departure of the Magi and the warning to Joseph that he should take the young child and flee; which interval there certainly does not, on the face of St. Matthew's narrative, appear to have been, (verses 12, 13;) however, that does not absolutely exclude it. 2. Time is thus allowed for the Magi to have travelled from their distant homes, which it hardly is, if we suppose them to have stood by the cradle on the thirteenth day after the Nativity. The journey from beyond the Euphrates to Jerusalem was not ordinarily one of less than

three or four months.* 3. Those who set the visit toward the end of the second year, find here an explanation of that which, according to the common explanation, they find inconceivable,—namely, the slaughter of children of two years old for the purpose of reaching an infant new-born.

Such are their chief grounds; yet the disadvantages of this arrangement, in my mind, more than countervail its advantages, so that I should certainly prefer to adhere to the old order of the events. I would not, indeed, urge, as some do, against that scheme, that the harmonizing of the narrative of Matthew with that of Luke becomes thus a good deal more difficult, inasmuch as, after the presentation in the temple, and before the dwelling at Nazareth, there must have been not merely the flight into Egypt, but a return to Bethlehem, that the wise men might find the holy family there. Bethlehem was

* Ezra is four months travelling from Babylon to Jerusalem, (Ezra vii, 9;) the tidings of the destruction of Jerusalem do not reach Ezekiel in Chaldea for near five months. (2 Kings xxv, 8, 9; Ezek. xxxiii, 21.) See Greswell's Dissert., v. 2, pp. 138–140.

too near to Jerusalem,—at a distance but of seven or eight of our English miles,—to make any difficulty in this. But certainly the words, "*When Jesus was born, behold there came wise men from the east,*" do seem to imply the intention of the narrator to place his birth and their coming in far closer juxtaposition than that it can be allowable to intercalate two years, and all the events of Luke ii, 22–38, between.*

Again: the difficulties of the Magi's presence from so remote a land on the twelfth day after the Saviour's birth, and of the decree of death including children under two years old, are, one of them entirely removed, the other greatly lightened, by the simple

* It is Ἰησοῦ *γεννηθέντος*, not *γεγεννημένου*. Cf. Heb. xi, 23; Μωσῆς *γεννηθεὶς ἐκρύβη*. Nor need the *παιδίον* of St. Matthew make the slightest difficulty; for, however it may be quite true that not *παιδίον* but *βρέφος* is the new-born babe, and is so used of Christ, (Luke ii, 12; cf. 1 Peter ii, 2,) and however the Greek grammarians may have recognised the distinction, (thus Eustathius, quoted by Wetstein: *βρέφος, τὸ ἄρτι γεγονός· παιδίον, τὸ τρεφόμενον ὑπὸ τηθῆς,*) yet *παιδίον* is also continually used for such; it is applied to the Baptist, but eight days old, (Luke i, 59,) and the *παιδία* of Matt. xix, 13 = *βρέφη* of Luke xviii, 15.

assumption—which to me seems on other grounds the most to be preferred—that the star did not appear simultaneously with the Saviour's birth, but preceded and announced it. Granting that the star had first appeared at the period, not of the Lord's birth, but of his incarnation, which was the opinion of Chrysostom,* and the parallel "sign of the Son of man in heaven," (Matt. xxiv, 30,) does not accompany, but precedes his second advent, we shall then have abundant time for the coming of the wise men even from the remotest East. And if we only suppose that Herod did what, if this view is correct, so many interpreters must have done,—namely, made the mistake of supposing that the appearance of the star and the birth of the Child fell at the same moment,—this, too, the Magi, while as yet they had not been at Bethlehem, may have presumed,—and add to the nine months thus obtained the forty days, and somewhat more, which intervened before the king's decree went forth, we shall thus have nearly a year.

* In Matt., Hom. 7. 3: so Theophylact.

Supposing, further, we were justified in making St. Matthew's "*two years old*" to signify those in their second year, and the Jews did count a year and a day, or, in the case of animals intended for sacrifice, a year and a month, as though it were two years,* then the entire difficulty arising from the age of the children that were to die will have disappeared; since Herod would certainly have allowed himself the margin of a month or two to prevent mistakes. And even if he set the age at full two years, meaning that his banditti's swords should certainly find out a child that even by his own calculation could only have been of one year, or, as the ancient Church supposed, of much less than one, there is nothing very wonderful in such exaggerated precautions of cruelty—they are only in keeping with the exaggerated suspicions which dictated the crime at all.

* See the proofs that this was so in Greswell's Dissert., v. 2, p. 136, who also quotes from Aristotle (Περὶ ζώων, ii, 2, 11): Ἀποβάλλει δὲ τὰ κέρατα μόνος ὁ ἔλαφος κατ' ἔτος, ἀρξάμενος ἀπὸ διετοῦς,—which means *in its second* year.

After all, there are difficulties in every arrangement of the succession of events; though not so great as some would have us to believe; but this, to my mind, seems the preferable arrangement. If this be correct, and if our Lord's birth did take place, as the best chronologists seem more and more to be coming to agreement that it did, at the close of the year 747 U. C., then, since Herod died early in 750,* his abode in Egypt must have

* The year of Herod's death is not without its difficulty, nor yet is our uncertainty about the year in which the Saviour of the world was born without its importance, as giving us a certain terminus before which that must have happened; for, though how much before will still remain approximatively, and from other grounds, to be concluded, yet it is something to have one of the limits secure. Now everything here points to the spring of 750 A. U. C. The most important help for the fixing of this date is, as so often happens in ancient history, an eclipse; for such an eclipse of the moon, we learn from Josephus, (Ant., 17, 6, 4,) happened during his last illness, and not very many days before his decease. But no eclipses of the moon were visible in Judæa near enough to the one which took place in the night between March 12th and 13th, 750, to dispute with it the right of being the one to which the Jewish historian alludes. For the numismatic argument, which is complicated, but which issues in exactly the same results, see Münter's Der Stern der Weisen, pp. 76–81. The respect owing to so profound and independent an investi-

been of two years' duration. Should 749 be rather the year of the Nativity, in this case Egypt will have afforded its shelter to the holy family scarcely more months. Almost as soon as they were there, the command will have been given to return. In this last case Herod must have issued the decree for the massacre of the children from that horrible death-bed, which Josephus so fully describes —which atrocity, if it seems inconceivable at such a time, we must only remember that from that same death-bed, and only five days before his own decease, he did not shrink from giving the command, which was obeyed, for the putting of his own son to death.

gator of the ancient chronology as Mr. Greswell, should hinder one from passing unnoticed the fact that he has called in question this result, himself placing the death of Herod a year later, that is, in 751 A. U. C. (Dissert., v. 1, p. 272 seq.)

§ 14.—*The Return from Egypt.*

But now, this tyranny being overpast, and the earth rid of that monster's presence,—"*Behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Arise, and take the young Child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead that sought the young Child's life.*" The plural here does not require us to assume any other deaths than that already mentioned in the text, of Herod himself—not that, for example, of some principal abettors of his, in counsel or in act, in the crime which he had meditated, and who had died as well as he.* The use of such a plural is far too common to make any difficulty here, or any such supposition needful. The immediate motive to the plural here was, probably, an intention of thus bringing this passage of our Lord's

* Thus Keppler suggests Antipater, who, having prompted his father to the putting of his two brothers to death, as his possible rivals to the throne, so might have instigated out of a like motive the present massacre, but had himself perished by his father's command.

life into closer and more observable relation with the parallel circumstances in the life of Moses; in the narration of which these very words occur: "All the men are dead that sought thy life." Exod. iv, 19.* There, in the interval of forty years which had elapsed since Moses had fled from Egypt, we can quite understand how all had died who had nourished purposes of revenge against him. Here it is little likely that any other besides Herod himself is intended.

* Spanheim (Dub. Evang., 85, 3): Evidens est verbis Evangelistæ [Angeli?] allusum ad revocationem Mosis in Egyptum, qui infanticidio subductus, infanticidâ sublato, iisdem pæne verbis revocatus legitur: *ἄπελθε εἰς Αἴγυπτον· τεθνήκασι γὰρ πάντες οἱ ζητοῦντες σου τὴν ψυχήν.* (Exod. iv, 19.) Hinc etiam collatio illa *παράλληλος* aliquomodo firmatur et illustratur quam instituimus (in expositione verborum Ex Ægypto evocavi filium meum) inter populum Israeliticum et Christum primogenitum Dei, inter utriusque conditionem, et beneficium subsequutum. Utique sane negari nequit liberatorem typicum et verum iisdem verbis revocatum, et suavem dari comparationem inter Christum et Mosem, uterque infanticidio subductus, uterque revocatus, uterque Dei voce revocatus, uterque post obitum tyrannorum, uterque Dux populi Dei constitutus. And Grotius: Non temere est quod ipsa verba usurpantur quæ exstant, Exod. iv, 19: id enim solet in sacris litteris rei gestæ similitudinem declarare.

"*And he arose, and took the young Child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judæa in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither.*" It may at first sight seem strange that Joseph should not have certainly concluded that, if the father was dead, the son would succeed to his throne, that he should not have calculated on this from the first, instead of suffering a later discovery of it to compel him altogether to alter his plans. But, in fact, this unexpected discovery of his, that Archelaus reigned in Judæa, is exactly that which, when we know accurately the circumstances of his accession to his father's throne, we should have looked for. It was not merely that there were so many vicissitudes in the bloody house of the Idumæan that Joseph might easily have anticipated some other arrangement; but Josephus expressly tells us that Herod had intended to leave the kingdom to his son Herod Antipas, but on his death-bed altered the entire disposition of his dominions, and, bequeathing to him only the tetrarchy

of Galilee and Peræa, left the kingdom to Archelaus.* How exactly, then, does the course which Joseph pursues fall in with the historic circumstances of the time! He drew nigh to Judæa, taking for granted that it would be as it had been settled, and as probably it was notorious to all—namely, that Antipas, a weak and unworthy prince, but one to whom no such atrocities were imputed as to his father and brother, sat on his father's throne; and then, on the borders of the land, he learned, to his dismay, that this arrangement had been reversed, that Archelaus, the genuine son of his father, the inheritor of all his cruelty, had succeeded to his throne, and ruled in the land where he proposed to dwell.

Archelaus was a son of Herod, by a Samaritan woman, Malthace by name; and was privately brought up, with his whole brother Antipas, at Rome.† He did not "*reign*," in the strictest sense of the word—that is, as king; for although Herod bequeathed to

* Ant., 17, 8, 1.

† Josephus, Ant., l. 17, c. 1, § 3; B. J., l. 1, c. 28, § 4.

him the title of royalty, and he was saluted king by the army,* yet when he went to Rome, that the title might be confirmed by Augustus, an embassage of the Jews followed him there, protesting against his domination, on the score of his father's intolerable cruelty and his own; for they said that, almost immediately on his accession, and as if he feared that he should not be recognised as the genuine son of his father, he had inaugurated his reign by the massacre, on no sufficient provocation, of three thousand Jewish citizens.† They prevailed so far, that Augustus would for the present only allow him the title of ethnarch, with the promise that the higher dignity should be his, in case he so conducted himself as to deserve it.‡ Continuing in his cruel and tyrannous courses, he again provoked the

* B. J., l. 1, c. 33, §§ 8, 9.

† Their words are striking in their relation to the passage before us: Τὸν δέ, ὥσπερ ἀγωνιάσαντα, μὴ νόθος υἱὸς δόξειεν Ἡρώδου, προοιμιάσασθαι τὴν βασιλείαν τρισχιλίων πολιτῶν φόνῳ. Joseph felt that he was this genuine son of his father.

‡ B. J., l. 2, c. 1, §§ 2, 3; and c. 6, §§ 2, 3.

Jews to carry accusations against him to Rome; and this time with more entire success—for the emperor removed him altogether from his rule, after he had abused it for ten years, and banished him to Vienne in Gaul, where he died.*

Again Joseph is instructed what he shall do; "*being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee,*"—probably little knowing that he was herein preparing a fulfilment of the prophecy: "The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined." Isa. ix, 2; cf. Matt. iv, 15, 16. "*And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.*" That explanation of these last words is perhaps encumbered with the fewest difficulties, which starts with calling attention to the plural, "*by the prophets,*" which the evangelist here uses—a form of citation from the Old Testament, which only appears once

* B. J., l. 2, c. 7, § 3.

elsewhere. (Mark i, 2;) and then evidently because the sacred writer is making allusion to passages from more prophets than one,—namely, to Mal. iii, 1, and Isa. xl, 1. Here in like manner, it has been said, by the use of the plural, "*the prophets*," and not "*the prophet*," St. Matthew would indicate that we have a *collective* fulfilment of prophecy—a fulfilment of that which was spoken, not by one prophet, but by many.* As, however, it is plain that our Lord's bringing up at Nazareth, with the scornful appellation of "the Nazarene," which he consequently bore,† is nowhere distinctly and in as many words foretold in the prophets, we must look a little deeper, and see if there be not an underlying vein of prophecy—prophecies, not one, but many, which at their inmost centre

* Jerome: Si fixum de Scripturis posuisset exemplum, nunquam diceret, *quod dictum est per prophetas:* sed simpliciter, quod dictum est per prophetam; nunc autem pluraliter prophetas vocans, ostendit se *non verba* de Scripturis sumsisse, *sed sensum.*

† For proof of the manner in which this name has survived, among the Jews, as a name of scorn applied to the Saviour, see Eisenmenger's Entdeckt. Judenthum, v. 1, pp. 64, 254, 631.

and core were fulfilled when this title of contempt was given Him. These prophecies I believe no other than all those which foretold his low estate, the contempt and scorn which should be his portion from an ungodly world; such, for example, as Isa. xlix, 7; liii, 3; Psa. xxii,—all which scorn and contempt were incorporated and gathered up in this nickname, for such originally it was, of "the Nazarene." For what did that name imply, but that he drew his origin from the most despised city (John i, 46) of the most despised province in the land, (John vii, 52;) from a city out of which even a Nathanael could expect no good thing; from a province out of which the haughty schools of Jerusalem affirmed, though indeed falsely,* (John vii, 52,) that no prophet *had* come; from which, therefore, it was little likely that the greatest Prophet of all should come.

It is true that even Bethlehem, the Lord's

* Gath-hepher, the birth-place of Jonah, (2 Kings xiv, 25,) and Elkosch, of Nahum, were both in Galilee; and a greater than either, Elijah, was of Thisbe, which pertained to the same region. (Tob. i, 2.)

true birth-place, was, as we have seen, small, and outwardly of little account,—"*least among the princes of Judah;*" but then how full of glorious recollections; with a history entwined with that of patriarchs, prophets, and kings,—where Rachel, the favourite wife of Jacob, had died, and was buried, (Gen. xxxv, 19;) where Ruth had been espoused to him by whom she became the ancestress of the line of Judah's kings, (Ruth iv, 18–22;) and more yet than this, the city of David "the king;" and more than this all, the city which long ago had been designated as the birth-place of Him who, being David's son, was yet also David's Lord.

What a contrast to all this did Nazareth present!—not once mentioned in the Old Testament; not once mentioned, as we may note in passing, by the great Jewish antiquarian and historian, Josephus—probably not having come into existence till after the return from the captivity; its very name indicating, as some suppose, its littleness;* without a single

* נֵצֶר a little shoot, as contrasted with a stately tree. (See Hengstenberg, Christologie, v, 2, p. 4.)

venerable tradition, without one association of dignity; a place so little befitting the Lord of glory in their eyes who had only an eye for outward glory, that "of Nazareth," or "Nazarene," attached to the Lord's name, seemed to them who looked no deeper than the surface, at once to refute his claims to the Messiahship, and to justify their rejection of Him as such; for, as some of these objectors urged: "Hath not the Scripture said that Christ cometh from the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" John vii, 42.

In estimating the motives which induced St. Matthew to urge this point, we must not leave out of sight an intention which, it is evident, his Gospel, and especially these two first chapters of it, had—namely, to remove every occasion of stumbling out of the way of Jewish readers, or of converts from the circumcision recently made. All the events and circumstances of the Lord's life, that might have perplexed or offended these, as being contrary to their expectations, he so treats of, that they shall now see in them not

arguments against his claims to be the Christ, but for it. So is it here. Not, he would imply, without an express command of God, did it come to pass that this Child was brought up at Nazareth; in his nurture there, and in the slight which accrued to Him from this, was only fulfilled that which their own prophets had long since foretold. These had spoken of Messiah as one whose outward circumstances should be inglorious, in whom his brethren should see no external beauty or dignity that they should desire Him: and thus, when their contempt gathered itself up in the one contemptuous epithet, "the Nazarene," an epithet which this his residence in Nazareth suggested and supplied, they did but fulfil in regard of Jesus, the son of Mary, that which long since had been declared should find its fulfilment in Him who was indeed the Christ.

A word or two may be permitted in conclusion—which I am the more inclined to add, as I cannot doubt that, whenever in our country the assault on those Divine facts

whereon our faith is founded, and on the sacred record which contains them, begins, (if it has not begun already,) the history of the infancy will be one of the earliest and chiefest points of attack. To enter into a defence of, or apology for, this portion of sacred history is not, and has not been, except incidentally, my intention; for I have written for them who believe, and not for them who do not. Yet this much it may be permitted to observe. For as many, indeed, as deny that the name of this Child, of whom St. Matthew is telling, was "Wonderful," "the Mighty God," (Isa. ix, 6,) it is nothing strange, but only consistent, that *they* should be perplexed and offended with all about his birth, which marks Him out as so different from the other children of men; that they should seek to explain away the ideal aspect in which all of the actual presents itself here; to dissipate, if they may, the nimbus of glory which encircles the Saviour's head, even while He is yet this "infant of days." It is nothing strange that they should endeavour to get rid of the witness which is borne to Him,

even in his cradle, alike by heaven, by earth, and by hell—by star and by angels from heaven,—by wise men and simple, seers and shepherds, on earth,—and as by their reverence and love, so not less by the instinctive hatred of the wicked king, wherein all hell bears witness that it, too, knows its destroyer to be at hand.

Such gainsaying must naturally be expected. But for as many as devoutly receive the central fact, the wonder of wonders,—namely, that this Child was Immanuel, was "God with us,"—they will count that *this* rather would have been strange, this inexplicable, if heaven had broken forth upon earth, and had yet given no tokens nor signs that it was heaven and not earth which now was blossoming and budding, God and not merely man that was being born. This, indeed, would have perplexed *them*, if the newest and most unwonted of all should yet have had nothing new, nothing unwonted about it, nothing to distinguish it from the commonest and the most out-worn of our old and work-day world;—that the most wonderful should

have appeared, and yet, notwithstanding, should have grouped round it no choir of attendant wonders. They, at least, will not be of the number of those who will allow nature to have its poetry and its prophecy, but not grace, even the world to have its harmonies, heard from time to time above its harsher discords, but not the Church and the kingdom of heaven; who are content that beauty should stand in the service of fiction, but not of truth; who, rather, on the instant that they meet it in this service, count it suspicious, as though some one must have feigned it there, as though of itself it never could have stood in that service, nor done actual homage to Him, from whom yet all beauty descends, the weak shadows and reflexes of whose transcendent glory is all of glorious which we here behold.

No words of my own will so fitly express the tone in which I would fain conclude this essay as those which the Prayer-Book supplies:—"O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to

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